Sixty Songs of Milarepa

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Selected and introduced by
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On previous page Jetsun Milarepa is shown sitting at ease in front of the cave at Ghadaya near the Tibet-Nepal border. Above him appears the form of his Guru, Marpa the Translator, since meditations visualizing a Buddha or the Guru above the head, are commonly practised in Tibet (see also the *Jinapanjara,* a Pali composition). Around him tower rocks and mountains while waterfalls cascade below. To his right sits a deer and to his left a hunting dog. Before him kneels a huntsman who has cast down his weapons as an offering to the Jetsun (see Song 14). This illustration follows the traditional iconography of Milarepa, his sitting at ease indicating that he has already experienced the state beyond striving. "Wearing cotton from Nepal" and a meditation-belt and with his hand cupped to his ear as though listening to the 'long tongue of the Dhamma' which preaches everywhere and all the time, the great yogi prepares to instruct the erstwhile hunter.

The picture on the previous page was kindly provided by the Venerable Dhardo Rinpoche of the Indo-Tibet Buddhist Cultural Institute, Kalimpong (W. Bengal).

Introduction

Outside the land of Tibet where the stories and songs of Milarepa are very well-known and loved, far too little is known of this great Buddhist sage. In English[1], French and German, biographies, partial or complete, have been published but a great number of Milarepa's Songs have remained inaccessible, except to those reading Tibetan, until very recently. It is possible to reproduce here sixty of his songs on the Dhamma through the kind permission of the translator, Prof. C. C. Chang, and the courtesy of his publishers, University Books Inc, New York.[2]

The songs printed here all concern that Dhamma which is common to the whole Buddhist tradition. Everyone who has read some of Lord Buddha's Discourses in the Pali Canon will find the subject matter here familiar to them. The nearest approach in Pali literature to these Dhamma-songs of Milarepa are the inspired utterances of Lord Buddha in the Sutta Nipata, Udana and Itivuttaka (and also in the Dhammapada), and the poems of gnosis spoken by the great bhikkhus and bhikkhunis of the Noble Sangha, now collected into such books as the Theragatha and Therigatha. Among the Bhikkhus living in the Buddha-time, Vangisa Thera was outstanding for his inspired utterances (see Samyutta Nik.I.viii; Theragatha 395). The mind inspired and illumined with the knowledge of liberation (vimutti) pours forth its wisdom with ease in the shape of verses of great beauty and deep significance. Such was the case with Lord Buddha and some of his immediate disciples, and later, such was the case with Milarepa.

His songs have been arranged here according to subject, though no rigid classification is possible since many of the

songs deal with more than one aspect of the Dhamma. First come Milarepa's descriptions of some of his hermitages, then songs on renunciation and the dangers of Samsara, followed by many more on impermanence. After them come songs describing different aspects of Samsara – such as the Six Realms of Birth; birth, old age, sickness and death; and home relatives and wealth. Next are songs relating to practice – advice on how to practise and warnings about what not to do; then upon the Six Paramita and other such helpful qualities for practice as Loving-kindness (Metta), Striving (Viriya) and Mindfulness (Sati). Last of all come songs describing aspects of Milarepa's realization – his contentment, happiness and non-attachment – concluding with his blessings to his patrons.

It will be seen from the above sequence that the Teaching here is not at all strange to Theravada, including as it does the Impermanence (anicca) of all things, states, people, places; that they are impermanent since they arise dependent upon conditions (paccaya); that what is conditioned, and therefore relative, is also devoid of essential being (sabbe dhamma anatta) and void of self (suñña); and that by not recognizing these truths and by thinking in terms of permanence, self, etc., we come to experience unending Unsatisfactoriness (dukkha). Milarepa also points out the Way to transcend *dukkha* and emphasizes the keeping of Precepts (sila), concentrating the scattered mind (samadhi) and the development of Wisdom (pañña).

In making comparisons of different Buddhist traditions many similarities are apt to come to light. One that might be mentioned here is the immense respect and honour paid to Enlightened Teachers in any Buddhist tradition, quite regardless of the differences of time and place. One who has seen and known the Way from his own experience has always been lauded as worthy of the highest honour and the greatest devo-

tion as in Pali: Ahuneyyo, Pahuneyyo, Dakkhineyyo, Anjalikaraniyo. Indeed, we find this as much in the pages of the Pali Canon as from the Hundred Thousand Songs. It is heard as much in the exalted devotion of Pingiya (Sutta Nipata 1131 ff.) as in the pæans of praise uttered by the principle disciples of Milarepa, Rechungpa and Gambopa. It is found in modern times in seemingly diverse surroundings – whether in a jungle monastery in Thailand where a thudong (dhutanga) bhikkhu is respecting his Teacher; or whether it is Tibetan bhikkhus or laymen receiving a meditation transmission from their Lama. The same devotion here finds expression; it is called Saddha or Bhatti (bhakti – a word first occurring in Indian literature in the Pali Canon), for this is the act by one still unenlightened, of setting his heart upon Enlightenment in the presence of one who is Enlightened.

Then again, the Hundred Thousand Songs many times mention the "Whispered Transmission" of meditation instructions which are imparted by the Teacher, here Milarepa, to his disciples. By some this is contrasted with the statement of Lord Buddha that He was not a Teacher who had a 'closed fist', that is, one who keeps some Teaching secret or esoteric. Nonetheless, He is well-known for his remarkable ability in preaching exactly the right Dhamma to fit the situation and meet the understanding of those who listened. He did not teach the deep truths of Dhamma to those who were not prepared as yet to receive them and in a like fashion Milarepa graded his teachings for varying circumstances and intelligences.

Meditation instructions given by Lord Buddha to his disciples were also fitted to their temperaments and abilities. It is true that one may now read books explaining the principles of meditation in Theravada Buddhism, but with books alone, even if one reads all the Pali Canon, the disadvantage remaining is very great. In all Buddhist countries, it is always assumed that one must have a Teacher if meditation practice

is to be really successful. It is this Teacher who, like Lord Buddha in past times, imparts to one the *details* of the practice and *how*, moreover, it applies to one's special problems and circumstances. As Bhadanta Nyanaponika Mahathera has written in his "Heart of Buddhist Meditation": 'A brief statement on practical meditation, even if limited to the very first steps as is done here, cannot replace personal guidance by an experienced teacher who alone can give due consideration to the requirements and rate of progress of the individual disciple.' This is, if not a "Whispered Transmission", at least an Oral Instruction.

The 'grace' of the Teacher (guru) consists of those merits which he has gathered by his own practice and which, it is believed, may be transferred to the disciple, thus 'blessing' him. This can only happen, however, provided that the conditions (of spiritual purity, faith, concentration, etc.) exist between that master and disciple. It is a great mistake to suppose that the disciple is getting something for nothing, for in the absence of these conditions he will experience no 'help' from the teacher.

For the dramatic and very inspiring life-story of Jetsun Milarepa as written down by a great-grand-disciple in his tradition, we have but little space here. Those interested in reading it may consult the book mentioned in the footnotes above. Suffice to say here that the Jetsun was born in BE 1596 (CE 1052) into a wealthy merchant family. As a boy he was known as Tubhaga (delightful-to-hear), a name which people said was particularly appropriate since he had a fine voice and frequently sang the local ballads. His voice was later to be used for spreading the Dhamma, and those who heard it were deeply moved.

Fortunately, Milarepa has given an outline of his life in one of the songs he later sang for his disciples and we cannot do better than introduce an extract of it here.

1

I am Milarepa blessed by his (Marpa's) mercy.
My father was Mila Shirab Jhantsan,
My mother was Nyantsa Karjan.
And I was called Tubhaga ("Delightful-to-hear").

Because our merits and virtues were of small account,
And the Cause-Effect Karma of the past spares no one,
My father Mila passed away (too early in his life).
The deceiving goods and belongings of our household
Were plundered by my aunt and uncle,
Whom I and my mother had to serve.
They gave us food fit only for the dogs;
The cold wind pierced our ragged clothing;
Our skin froze and our bodies were benumbed.
Often I was beaten by my uncle,
And endured his cruel punishment.
Hard was it to avoid my aunt's ill temper.

I lived as best I could, a lowly servant,
And shrugged my shoulders (in bitter resignation).
Misfortunes descended one after the other;
We suffered so, our hearts despaired.

In desperation, I went to Lamas[3]
Yundun and Rondunlaga,
From whom I mastered the magic arts of Tu,
Ser and Ded[4].
Witnessed by my aunt and uncle, I brought
Great disaster on their villages and kinsmen,
For which, later, I suffered deep remorse.
Then I heard the fame of Marpa, the renowned Translator,
Who, blessed by the saints Naropa and Medripa,
Was living in the upper village of the South River.

After a hard journey I arrived there.
For six years and eight months (I stayed)
With him, my gracious Father Guru, Marpa.
For him I built many houses,
One with courtyards and nine storeys;
Only after this did he accept me.

(Page numbers in the complete translation: pp. 267–8)

Then Milarepa lists the meditation-instructions which he was given by his Guru Marpa after he had thus served a long period of hard probation and tells how by their practice he reached Enlightenment (see conclusion of this Introduction).

The name by which he is known in Tibet is Jetsun Milarepa. 'Jetsun' is an honorific meaning 'holy', while 'Repa' means 'clad in cotton'. Mila was a family name. Hence, in English he may be called Holy Mila the Cotton-clad. He earned the latter name by his power to live throughout the bitter Tibetan winter with only one length of cotton cloth. Where others would have died, he lived happily immersed in the various states of samadhi producing, by his control of them, sufficient body heat. After twelve years of intense meditations in remote mountain caves far from the haunts of men in the valleys below, he succeeded in winning Enlightenment. After this time, disciples gradually gathered around him, the first being Rechungpa, his 'moon-like' disciple, while later came his 'sun-like' disciple Gambopa [5]. His closest disciples went forth from their homes to take up homeless life with him. Gambopa and some others were already bhikkhus, while many more such as Rechungpa were called 'Repa', that is, yogis clad in one piece of cotton.

Like Lord Buddha, the Jetsun taught Dhamma to all – to the emissary of a king and to shepherds, to nuns and wealthy ladies, to bhikkhus and yogis, to bandits and merchants. His

conversion of the hunter, Chirawa Gwumbo Dorje, is as popular a story in Tibet as is the pacifying of Angulimala by Lord Buddha, in southern Buddhist lands.

At the age of eighty, Jetsun Milarepa relinquished the body, passing away surrounded by disciples both human and celestial. For 900 years the traditions of meditation in which he trained his disciples have been handed down in Tibet. It has come to be known as the Ghagyupa (sometimes seen as Kargyutpa) which is translated as the "Whispered Transmission". This school of Buddhist practice has, of course, its own special emphasis upon certain doctrines but songs concerned with them are not included in this booklet and the interested reader is requested to consult the "Hundred Thousand Songs of Milarepa".

In the time of Milarepa, as is evident from these songs, many bhikkhus spent long years in study but never gave much heed to practice. Thus is the divorce of patipatti-dhamma or sila (moral precepts) and samadhi (meditation), from pariyatti-dhamma or simply learning. Scholar-bhikkhus of Tibet were evidently, at that time, very able in arguing the finer points of Buddhist philosophy and well-equipped with logic to worst outsiders as well as fellow Buddhists in debates. Somehow, in the welter of this study (and the Tibetan Canon and its Commentaries are considerably more extensive than their lengthy Pali counterparts), the urge to practise meditation, many of its foremost exponents were masters not possessing the monk's robes. This was true of the spiritual forebears of Milarepa (his immediate Guru, Marpa and of the Indian yogis, Naropa and Tilopa). In several places he criticizes those bhikkhus, and indeed anyone, who studies the Dhamma just for intellectual satisfaction or even for worldly advantage. Many sincere bhikkhus did approach him for meditation instructions and, thereafter, practised with him as their Teacher. He was, therefore, a source for the spiritual regeneration of the Sangha in Tibet.

With his insistence upon the *practice* of Dhamma, Milarepa's life and teaching present striking similarities in many respects, to the Way as practised by the thudong (dhutanga) bhikkhu. The greatest difference is that a bhikkhu in any country is bound to observe his Fundamental Precepts (Patimokkha) which, as Milarepa did not have the bhikkhu ordination (Upasampada), he did not have to keep. Nevertheless, even a quick look at his life after he began his practice would reveal that he maintained scrupulously those injunctions given him by his Teacher, Marpa the Translator, as well as cultivating those twin bases of moral conduct in the Dhamma, Wisdom and Compassion (paññakaruna). Far greater than this are the resemblances between him and the thudong bhikkhu. For instance, both praise contentment with little, living remotely with utter detachment from worldly affairs, great ability in meditation, and so on.

Though he had not the formal ordination of a bhikkhu and wore not the monks' robes, yet Milarepa was truly one gone forth (pabbajita). No one reading of his life and some of the songs included here can possibly doubt this. According to definitions given in the Dhammapada, he was indeed a true bhikkhu:

> *"Not by adopting the outward form does one become a bhikkhu"* (266).

> *"He who has no attachment whatsoever towards the 'mind-and-body' and who does not grieve for what he has not, – he indeed, is called a bhikkku"* (367).

> *"Whoso herein, has abandoned both merit and demerit, he who is holy, he who walks with understanding in this world, – he indeed, is called a bhikkhu"* (267).[6]

These various points, and perhaps others, could be raised to point out that it is in the practice of Dhamma (patipatti) that different schools of Buddhist thought are shown to have many similarities. Finally, it is in realization of the Dhamma (pativedha) where all divergence ceases, since all the methods practised by all the schools are without exception aimed at the experience of Bodhi, or Enlightenment. If the Dhamma is only studied from books, then many differences are seen separating the many Buddhist traditions but in *practice* there is very much in common. Since all Buddhists are urged to *practise* their Teachings, it is through this that harmony between the divergent traditions of Dhamma may be discovered.

This little introduction may be concluded with a stanza drawn from the autobiographical song, part of which is quoted above. More than this need not be said here, for it is better that the Jetsun sings to you his inspiring and Wisdom-inspired Songs of the Dhamma.

"I renounced all affairs of this life;
And, no longer lazy, devoted myself to Dharma.
Thus I have reached the State of Eternal Bliss.
Such is the story of my life."

Khantipalo Bhikkhu,
Wat Bovoranives Vihara,
Bangkok, Thailand.
6th of the Waning Moon of Citta 2508
(22nd April 1965).

In the following text, the writer of this introduction is responsible for the precis stories and the notes, except where matter is found in parentheses. The latter has been drawn from the "Hundred Thousand Songs."

Poem 1 was introduced on page 9.



2

One day, after leaving his cave to collect firewood, Milarepa returned "to find five Indian demons with eyes as large as saucers" whom he thought to be apparitions of the deities who disliked him. As he had never given them any offering, he then began to sing a...

Complimentary Song to the Deities of Red Rock Jewel Valley

This lonely spot where stands my hut
Is a place pleasing to the Buddhas,
A place where accomplished beings dwell,
A refuge where I dwell alone.

Above Red Rock Jewel Valley
White clouds are gliding;
Below, the Tsang River gently flows;
Wild vultures wheel between.

Bees are humming among the flowers,
Intoxicated by their fragrance;
In the trees, birds swoop and dart,
Filling the air with their song.

In Red Rock Jewel Valley
Young sparrows learn to fly,
Monkeys love to leap and swing,
And beasts to run and race,
While I practise the Two Bodhi-minds[7] and love to meditate.

Ye local demons, ghosts and gods,
All friends of Milarepa,
Drink the nectar of kindness and compassion,
Then return to your abodes.

(p. 5)

3

One day, Milarepa's patrons from Dro Tang came to visit him. They asked him what benefits Junpan Nanka Tsang had to offer. In reply, Milarepa sang:

I pray to my Guru, the Holy One.
Listen, my patrons, and I will tell you
the merits of this place.

In the goodly quiet of this Sky Castle of Junpan
High above, dark clouds gather;
Deep blue and far below flows the River Tsang.

At my back the Red Rock of Heaven rises;
At my feet, wild flowers bloom, vibrant and profuse;
At my cave's edge (wild) beasts roam, roar and grunt;
In the sky vultures and eagles circle freely,
While from heaven drifts the drizzling rain.
Bees hum and buzz with their chanting;
Mares and foals gambol and gallop wildly;
The brook chatters past pebbles and rocks;
Through the trees monkeys leap and swing;
And larks carol in sweet song.

The timely sounds I hear are all my fellows.
The merits of this place are inconceivable –
I now relate them to you in this song.

Oh good patrons,
Pray follow my Path and my example;
Abandon evil, and practise good deeds.
Spontaneously from my heart
I give you this instruction.

(pp. 68–69)

4

One day, some villagers from Ragma came to see the Jetsun. They asked him, "Why do you like this place so much? Why is it that you are so happy here? Pray, tell us what you think of all these things!" In answer, Milarepa sang:

Here is the Bodhi-Place, quiet and peaceful.
The snow-mountain, the dwelling-place of deities,
    stands high above;
Below, far from here in the village, my faithful patrons live;
Surrounding it are mountains nestling in white snow.

In the foreground stand the wish-granting trees;
In the valley lie vast meadows, blooming wild.
Around the pleasant, sweet-scented lotus, insects hum;
Along the banks of the stream
And in the middle of the lake,
Cranes bend their necks, enjoying the scene,
and are content.

On the branches of the trees, the wild birds sing;
When the wind blows gently, slowly dances the weeping willow;
In the treetops monkeys bound and leap for joy;
In the wild green pastures graze the scattered herds,
And merry shepherds, gay and free from worry,
Sing cheerful songs and play upon their reeds.
The people of the world, with burning desires and craving,
Distracted by affairs, become the slaves of earth.

From the top of the Resplendent Gem Rock,
I, the yogi, see these things.
Observing them, I know that they are fleeting and transient;
Contemplating them, I realize that comforts and pleasure
Are merely mirages and water-reflections.

I see this life as a conjuration and a dream.
Great compassion rises in my heart
For those without a knowledge of this truth.
The food I eat is the Space-Void;
My meditation is Dhyana – beyond distraction.

Myriad visions and various feelings all appear before me –
Strange indeed are Samsaric phenomena!
Truly amazing are the dharmas in the Three Worlds,[8]
Oh, what a wonder, what a marvel!
Void is their nature, yet everything is manifested.

(pp. 64–65)

5

This song was sung to a young, well-dressed girl who after asking Milarepa about his father and mother, brothers and sisters, further enquired: "But do you also have any Samsaric companions, sons and belongings?" Milarepa then sang in reply:

At first, my experiences in Samsara[9]
Seemed most pleasant and delightful;
Later, I learned about its lessons;
In the end, I found a Devil's Prison.
These are my thoughts and feelings on Samsara.
So I made up my mind to renounce it.

At first, one's friend is like a smiling angel;
Later, she turns into a fierce exasperated woman;
But in the end a demoness is she.
These are my thoughts and feelings on companions.
So I made up my mind to renounce a friend.

At first, the sweet boy smiles, a Babe of Heaven;
Later, he makes trouble with the neighbours;
In the end, he is my creditor and foe.
These are my thoughts and feelings about children.
So I renounced both sons and nephews.

At first, money is like the Wish-fulfilling Gem;
Later, one cannot do without it;
In the end, one feels a penniless beggar.
These are my thoughts and feelings about money.
So I renounced both wealth and goods.

When I think of these experiences,
I cannot help but practise Dharma;
When I think of Dharma,
I cannot help but offer it to others.
When death approaches,
I shall then have no regret.

(p. 209)

6

On his way to Shri Ri to meditate, Milarepa lodged at an inn where a merchant, Dhawa Norbu (the Moon jewel), was also staying with a great retinue. Milarepa begged alms from him upon which the merchant remarked that it would be better for him to work to support himself. Milarepa pointed out that enjoying pleasures now is the source for more suffering in the future. Then he said: "Now listen to my song."

The Eight Reminders

Castles and crowded cities are the places
Where now you love to stay;
But remember that they will fall to ruins
After you have departed from this earth!

Pride and vain glory are the lure
Which now you love to follow;
But remember, when you are about to die
They offer you no shelter and no refuge!

Kinsmen and relatives are the people now
With whom you love to live;
But remember that you must leave them all behind
When from this world you pass away!

Servants, wealth and children
Are things you love to hold;
But remember, at the time of your death
Your empty hands can take nothing with you!

Vigour and health
Are dearest to you now;
But remember, at the moment of your death
Your corpse will be bundled up and borne away!

Now your organs are clear,
Your flesh and blood are strong and vigorous;
But remember, at the moment of your death
They will no longer be at your disposal!

Sweet and delicious foods are things
That now you love to eat;
But remember, at the moment of your death
Your mouth will let the spittle flow!

When of all this I think,
I cannot help but seek the Buddha's Teachings!
The enjoyments and the pleasures of this world
For me have no attraction.

I, Milarepa, sing of the Eight Reminders,
At the Guest House in Garakhache of Tsang.
With these clear words I give this helpful warning;
I urge you to observe and practise them!

(pp. 150–151)

7

Milarepa once said to Shindormo, his patroness: "But if you have a precious human body and have been born at a time and place in which the Buddhist religion prevails, it is very foolish indeed not to practise the Dharma." Milarepa thus sang:

At the feet of the Translator Marpa, I prostrate myself,
And sing to you, my faithful patrons.

How stupid it is to sin[10] with recklessness
While the pure Dharma spreads all about you.
How foolish to spend your lifetime without meaning,
When a precious human body is so rare a gift.

How ridiculous to cling to prison-like cities
and remain there.
How laughable to fight and quarrel
with your wives and relatives,
Who do but visit you.
How senseless to cherish sweet and tender words
Which are but empty echoes in a dream.

How silly to disregard one's life by fighting foes
Who are but frail flowers.

How foolish it is when dying
to torment oneself with thoughts of family,
Which bind one to Maya's[11] mansion.
How stupid to stint on property and money,
Which are a debt on loan from others.
How ridiculous it is to beautify and deck the body,
Which is a vessel full of filth.
How silly to strain each nerve for wealth and goods,
And neglect the nectar of the inner teachings!

In a crowd of fools, the clear and sensible
Should practise the Dharma, as do I.

(pp. 33–34)

8

A yogi who had great faith in Milarepa came with other patrons, bringing copious offerings, and they asked Milarepa "how he had managed to undergo the trials of his probationship and had exerted himself..." Milarepa answered with...

The Six Resolutions

When one has lost interest in this world,
His faith and longing for the Dharma is confirmed.

To relinquish one's home ties is very hard;
Only by leaving one's native land
Can one be immune from anger.

It is hard to conquer burning passions
Towards relatives and close friends;
The best way to quench them
Is to break all associations.

One never feels that one is rich enough;
Contented, he should wear humble cotton clothes.
He may thus conquer much desire and craving.

It is hard to avoid worldly attractions;
By adhering to humbleness,
Longing for vain glory is subdued.

It is hard to conquer pride and egotism;
So, like the animals,
Live in the mountains.

My dear and faithful patrons!
Such is the real understanding
That stems from perseverance.

I wish you all to practise deeds that are meaningful,[12]
And amass all merits!

(pp. 100–101)

9

Milarepa went out one day for alms and coming to a meeting of Dharma-followers, was ridiculed. One of them, however, recognized him and said: "To inspire those attending this meeting, therefore, please now sing for us." In response, Milarepa sang a song,

The Ocean of Samsara

Alas, is not Samsara like the sea?
Drawing as much water as one pleases,
It remains the same without abating.
Are not the Three Precious Ones like Mount Sumeru,
That never can be shaken by anyone?

...
Are there Mongol bandits invading yogis' cells?
Why, then, do great yogis stay in towns and villages?
Are not people craving for rebirth and Bardo?[13]
Why, then, do they cling so much to their disciples?
Are woollen clothes in the next life more expensive?
Why, then, do women make so much of them here?
Do people fear that Samsara may be emptied?
Why, then, do priests and laymen hanker after children?
Are you reserving food and drink for your next life?
Why, then, do men and women not give to charity?
Is there any misery in Heaven above?
Why, then, do so few plan to go there?
Is there any joy below in Hell?

Why, then, do so many prepare to visit there?
Do you not know that all sufferings
And Lower Realms are the result of sins?
Surely you know that if you now practise virtue,
When death comes you will have peace of mind
and no regrets.

(p. 539: extract)

10

Upon the arrival of autumn, Milarepa decided to leave Upper Lowo where he had been preaching the Dharma during the summer, and go to Di Se Snow Mountain. His patrons gave him a farewell party, circling round him, and made him offerings and obeisance. They said: "Be kind enough to give us, your disciples, some instructions and advice." The Jetsun then emphasized the transiency of all beings, admonishing them to practise Dharma earnestly. And he sang…

The Song of Transience with Eight Similes

Faithful disciples here assembled (ask yourselves):
"Have I practised Dharma with great earnestness?
Has the deepest faith arisen in my heart?"
He who wants to practise Dharma and gain
 non-regressive faith,
Should listen to this exposition of the Mundane Truths
And ponder well their meaning.
Listen to these parables and metaphors:

A painting in gold,
Flowers of turquoise blue,
Floods in the vale above,
Rice in the vale below,
Abundance of silk,
A jewel of value,
The crescent moon,
And a precious son –
These are the eight similes.

No one has sung before
Such casual words (on this),

No one can understand their meaning
If he heeds not the whole song.

The gold painting fades when it is completed –
This shows the illusory nature of all beings,
This proves the transient nature of all things.
Think, *then* you will practise Dharma.

The lovely flowers of turquoise blue
Are destroyed in time by frost –
This shows the illusory nature of all beings,
This proves the transient nature of all things.
Think, *then* you will practise Dharma.

The flood sweeps strongly down the vale above,
Soon becoming weak and tame in the plain below –
This shows the illusory nature of all beings,
This proves the transient nature of all things.
Think, *then* you will practise Dharma.

Rice grows in the vale below;
Soon with a sickle it is reaped
This shows the illusory nature of all beings,
This proves the transient nature of all things.
Think, *then* you will practise Dharma.

Elegant silken cloth
Soon with a knife is cut –
This shows the illusory nature of all beings,
This proves the transient nature of all things.
Think, *then* you will practise Dharma.

The precious jewel that you cherish
Soon will belong to others –
This shows the illusory nature of all beings,
This proves the transient nature of all things.
Think, *then* you will practise Dharma.

The pale moonbeams soon will fade and vanish –
This shows the illusory nature of all beings,
This proves the transient nature of all things.
Think, *then* you will practise Dharma.

A precious son is born;
Soon he is lost and gone –
This shows the illusory nature of all beings,
This proves the transient nature of all things.
Think, *then* you will practise Dharma.

These are the eight similes I sing.
I hope you will remember and practise them.

Affairs and business will drag on forever,
So lay them down and practise now the Dharma.
If you think tomorrow is the time to practise,
Suddenly you find that life has slipped away.
Who can tell when death will come?

Ever think of this,
And devote yourselves to Dharma practice.

(pp. 203–205)

11

Travelling with his disciples, Milarepa came to Din Ri Namar where he enquired for the name of the outstanding patron. Learning that the physician Yang Nge was a devoted Buddhist, he proceeded to his house, where the physician said, "It is said that Jetsun Milarepa can use anything at hand as a metaphor for preaching. Now please use the bubbles of water in this ditch before us as a metaphor and give us a discourse."

In response, Jetsun sang a song...

The Fleeting Bubbles

I pay homage to my gracious Guru –
Pray make everyone here think of the Dharma!
As he said once, "Like bubbles is
This life, transient and fleeting –
In it no assurance can be found."
A layman's life is like a thief
Who sneaks into an empty house.
Know you not the folly of it?

Youth is like a summer flower –
Suddenly it fades away.
Old age is like a fire spreading
Through the fields – suddenly 'tis at your heels.
The Buddha once said, "Birth and death
Are like sunrise and sunset –
Now come, now go."
Sickness is like a little bird
Wounded by a sling.
Know you not, health and strength
Will in time desert you?
Death is like an oil-dry lamp
(After its last flicker).
Nothing, I assure you,
In this world is permanent.
Evil Karma is like a waterfall,
Which I have never seen flow upward.
A sinful man is like a poisonous tree –
If you lean on it, you will injured be.
Transgressors are like frost-bitten peas –
Like spoiled fat, they ruin everything.

Dharma-practisers are like peasants in the field –
With caution and vigour they will be successful.
The Guru is like medicine and nectar –
Relying on him, one will win success.
Discipline is like a watchman's tower –
Observing it, one will attain Accomplishment.
The Law of Karma is like Samsara's wheel –
Whoever breaks it will suffer a great loss.
Samsara is like a poisonous thorn
In the flesh – if not pulled out,
The poison will increase and spread.
The coming of death is like the shadow
Of a tree at sunset –
It runs fast and none can halt it.
When that time comes,
What else can help but Holy Dharma?
Though Dharma is the fount of victory.
Those who aspire to it are rare.
Scores of men are tangled in
The miseries of Samsara;
Into this misfortune born,
They strive by plunder and theft for gain.

He who talks on Dharma
With elation is inspired,
But when a task is set him,
He is wrecked and lost.

Dear patrons, do not talk too much,
But practise the Holy Dharma.

(pp. 632–633)

12

"This is indeed very helpful to my mind," commented the physician, "but please preach still further for me on the truth of Karma and the suffering of birth, old age, illness and death, thus enabling me to gain a deeper conviction in Buddhadharma." In response, the Jetsun sang:

Please listen to these words,
Dear friends here assembled.

When you are young and vigorous
You ne'er think of old age coming,
But it approaches slow and sure
Like a seed growing underground.

When you are strong and healthy
You ne'er think of sickness coming,
But it descends with sudden force
Like a stroke of lightning.

When involved in worldly things
You ne'er think of death's approach
Quick it comes like thunder
Crashing 'round your head.

Sickness, old age and death
Ever meet each other
As do hands and mouth.
Waiting for his prey in ambush,
Yama[14] is ready for his victim,
When disaster catches him.

Sparrows fly in single file. Like them,
Life, Death and Bardo follow one another.
Never apart from you
Are these three 'visitors'.

Thus thinking, fear you not
Your sinful deeds?

Like strong arrows in ambush waiting,
Rebirth in Hell, as Hungry Ghost, or Beast
Is (the destiny) waiting to catch you.
If once into their traps you fall,
Hard will you find it to escape.

Do you not fear the miseries
You experienced in the past?
Surely you will feel much pain
If misfortunes attack you?
The woes of life succeed one another
Like the sea's incessant waves
One has barely passed, before
The next one takes its place.
Until you are liberated, pain
and pleasure come and go at random
Like passers-by encountered in the street.

Pleasures are precarious,
Like bathing in the sun;
Transient, too, as snowstorms
Which come without warning.
Remembering these things,
Why not practise the Dharma?

(pp. 634–635)

13

Rechungpa, after returning from India, had contracted the disease of pride and in various ways Milarepa tried to cure him. As his disciple required food, they went for alms but were abused by an old woman who declared that she had no

food. The next morning they found her dead and Milarepa said: "Rechungpa, like this woman, every sentient being is destined to die, but seldom do people think of this fact. So they lose many opportunities to practise the Dharma. Both you and I should remember this incident and learn a lesson from it." Whereupon, he sang...

The Song of Transiency and Delusion

When the transience of life strikes deeply into one's heart
One's thoughts and deeds will naturally accord with
Dharma.
If repeatedly and continuously one thinks about death,
One can easily conquer the demons of laziness.
No one knows when death will descend upon him –
Just as this woman last night!

Rechungpa, do not be harsh, and listen to your Guru!
Behold, all manifestations in the outer world
Are ephemeral like a dream last night!
One feels utterly lost in sadness
When one thinks of this passing dream.
Rechungpa, have you completely wakened
From this great puzzlement?
Oh, the more I think of this,
The more I aspire to Buddha and the Dharma.

The pleasure-yearning human body is an ungrateful creditor.
Whatever good you do to it,
It always plants the seeds of pain.

This human body is a bag of filth and dirt;
Never be proud of it, Rechungpa,
But listen to my song!

When I look back at my body,
I see it as a mirage-city;

Though I may sustain it for a while,
It is doomed to extinction.
When I think of this,
My heart is filled with grief!
Rechungpa, would you not cut off Samsara?
Oh, the more I think of this,
The more I think of Buddha and the Dharma!

A vicious person can never attain happiness.
Errant thoughts are the cause of all regrets,
Bad dispositions are the cause of all miseries,
Never be voracious, oh Rechungpa,
But listen to my song!

When I look back at my clinging mind,
It appears like a short-lived sparrow in the woods –
Homeless, and with nowhere to sleep;
When I think of this, my heart is filled with grief.
Rechungpa, will you let yourself indulge in ill-will?
Oh, the more I think of this,
The more I aspire to Buddha and the Dharma!

Human life is as precarious
As a single slim hair of a horse's tail
Hanging on the verge of breaking;
It may be snuffed out at anytime
Like this old woman was last night!
Do not cling to this life, Rechungpa,
But listen to my song!

When I observe inwardly my breathings
I see they are transient, like the fog;
They may vanish any moment into nought.
When I think of this, my heart is filled with grief.
Rechungpa, do you not want to conquer
That insecurity now?

Oh, the more I think of this,
The more I aspire to Buddha and the Dharma.

To be close to wicked kinsmen only causes hatred.
The case of this old woman is a very good lesson.
Rechungpa, stop your wishful-thinking
And listen to my song!

When I look at friends and consorts
They appear as passers-by in the bazaar;
Meeting with them is only temporary,
But separation is forever!
When I think of this, my heart is filled with grief.
Rechungpa, do you not want to cast aside
All worldly associations?
Oh, the more I think of this,
The more I think of Buddha and the Dharma.

A rich man seldom enjoys
The wealth that he has earned;
This is the mockery of Karma and Samsara,
Money and jewels gained through stinginess and toil
Are like this old woman's bag of food.
Do not be covetous, Rechungpa,
But listen to my song!

When I look at the fortunes of the rich,
They appear to me like honey to the bees –
Hard work, serving only for others' enjoyment,
Is the fruit of their labour.
When I think of this, my heart is filled with grief.
Rechungpa, do you not want to open
The treasury within your mind?
Oh, the more I think of this,
The more I aspire to Buddha and His Teachings.

(pp. 433–435)

14

When Milarepa was sitting in meditation, a frightened deer dashed by, followed by a ravening hound. By the power of his loving-kindness and compassion (Metta-Karuna), Milarepa made them lie down, one on either side of him, and then preached to them. Then came the fierce and proud huntsman, Chirawa Gwunbo Dorje, who was enraged by the sight of the Jetsun and shot an arrow at him, but missed. Milarepa sang to him and his heart began to turn to the Dharma. Then the hunter saw that Milarepa was living an austere life and great faith arose in him. He wished then to practise Dharma after talking with his family but the Jetsun warned him that his present meritorious thought might change and he sang:

Hearken, hearken, huntsman!
Though the thunder crashes,
It is but empty sound;
Though the rainbow is richly-coloured,
It will soon fade away.
The pleasures of this world are like dream-visions;
Though one enjoys them, they are the source of sin.
Though all we see may seem to be eternal,
It will soon fall to pieces and will disappear.

Yesterday perhaps one had enough or more,
All today is gone and nothing's left;
Last year one was alive, this year one dies.
Good food turns into poison,
And the beloved companion turns into a foe.

Harsh words and complaints requite
Good-will and gratitude.
Your sins hurt no one but yourself.
Among one hundred heads, you value most your own.

In all ten fingers, if one is cut, you feel the pain.
Among all things you value, yourself is valued most.
The time has come for you to help yourself.

Life flees fast. Soon death
Will knock upon your door.
It is foolish, therefore, one's devotion to postpone.
What else can loving kinsmen do
But throw one into Samsara?
To strive for happiness hereafter
Is more important than to seek it now.
The time has come for you to rely upon a Guru,
The time has come to practise Dharma.

(p. 284)

15

Milarepa: "If one is really determined to free oneself from the sufferings of Samsara, such as birth, old age, illness, death, and so on, he will have peace of mind all the time and will not need to make any effort. Otherwise, he should bear in mind that the sufferings in a future life could be much more durable and longer-lasting than those in this life, and the burden could also be much heavier. It is, therefore, of paramount importance to take steps to prepare for the next life." This was said to some young men from his native country, who asked how they could extricate themselves from worldly affairs. Then, Milarepa said: "Please hearken, and I will sing a song for you."

We sentient beings moving in the world
Float down the flowing stream
Of the Four Sufferings.[15]

Compared to this, how much more formidable
Are the unceasing future lives in Samsara
Why not, then, prepare a boat for the "crossing"?

The state of our future lives is far more fearful
And deserving of far more concern
Than are the dreadful demons, ghosts and Yama,
So why not prepare for yourself a guide?

Even the dread passions – craving, hatred and blindness –
Are not so fearful
As the state of our (unknown) future,
So why not prepare for yourself an antidote?

Great is the Kingdom of the Three Realms of Samsara,
But greater is the endless road of birth-and-death,
So why not prepare for yourself provisions?
It will be better if you practise Dharma
If you have no assurance in yourselves.

(pp. 114–115)

»«»«

Milarepa said: "A human body, free and opportune, is as precious as a jewel, and to have a chance to practise the Dharma is likewise very rare. Also, to find one serious Buddhist in a hundred is difficult! Considering the difficulties of meeting the right Gurus, and other necessary favourable conditions for practising Buddhism, you should deem yourselves very fortunate that you have now met all these requirements. Do not, therefore, (waste them), but practise the Dharma."

(p. 116)

16

Shiwa Aui, a leading disciple of Milarepa, once asked his Master, when the latter was nearing the end of his life: "Please tell us what are the joys and miseries that sentient beings experience in the Six Realms? Especially, please tell us what are the pleasures *devas* enjoy?" The Jetsun replied: Do not be fascinated by the pleasures of heavenly beings; they also have miseries – like this:

The pleasures enjoyed by men and devas
Are like the amusements of the Heavenly Yak:[16]
It may low like thunder
But what good can it do?

(Swooning in a state of trance),
The devas in the four Formless Heavens[17]
Cannot distinguish good from evil.
Because their minds are dull and callous,
Insensible, they have no feeling.
In unconscious stupefaction,

They live many kalpas in a second.
What a pity that they know it not!
Alas, these heavenly births
Have neither sense nor value.
When they think vicious thoughts
They start to fall again.
As to the reason for their fall
(Scholars), with empty words,
Have dried their mouths in explanations.

In the Heavens of Form,[18]
The devas of the five higher and twelve lower realms
Can only live until their merits are exhausted.

Their virtues are essentially conditional,
And their Karma basically Samsaric.

Those Dharma-practisers subject to worldly desires,
And those 'great yogis' wrapped in stillness,
Have yet to purify their minds;
Huge may be their claims and boasts,
But habitual thought-seeds
In their minds are deeply rooted.
After a long dormant time,
Evil thoughts again will rise.
When their merits and fortunes are consumed;
They to the Lower Realms[19] will go once more!

If I explain the horror of a deva's death,
You will be disheartened and perplexed.
Bear this in your mind and ever meditate!

(p. 663)

17

In a sad mood the disciples then asked the Jetsun to preach to them of the sufferings of the *asuras*. In response, he sang:

Great are asuras' sufferings.
Misled by malignant thoughts,
To all they bring misfortunes
Knowing not their true Self-mind[20]
Their deeds are self-deceiving,
Their feelings coarse, their senses crude,
Deeming all to be their foes,
Not even for a moment
Can they know the truth.

Evil by nature, they can hardly bear a loss;
Harder is benevolence for them to cherish.
Blinded by the Karma-of-Belligerence,
Never can they take good counsel.

All nature such as this is caused
By seeking pleasures for oneself
And bearing harmful thoughts towards others.
Pride, favouritism, vanity and hatred
Are the evil Karmic forces
That drag one to a lower birth,
Making sinful deeds more easy.

Ripening Karma brings (to them)
An instinctive hatred;
Failing to distinguish right from wrong,
They can hardly be helped by any means.
Bear, oh my disciples, this in your minds
And meditate with perseverance all your lives!

(p. 664)

18

Shiwa Aui said, "Now please tell us about the sufferings of *human beings*." In answer, Milarepa sang:

We human beings are endowed with power
To do good, or evil deeds;
This is because our body (personality)
is made of all Six Elements.[21]

You junior Repas who desire to be great scholars
Should know the 'Kernel and shell' of Buddhism.
Lest learning lead you only to confusion.

Knowing not the *root of mind,*
Useless is it to meditate for years.
Without sincerity and willingness,
Rich offerings have no real meaning.

Without giving impartial aid to all,
Patronage of one's favourite is wrong.
Knowing not the right counsel for each man,
Blunt talk will only bring trouble and discord.

He who knows the appropriate way
To help men of diverse dispositions,
Can use expedient words[22] for kind and fruitful purposes.
He who knows but little of himself
Can harm many by his ignorance.
When good-will arises in one's mind,
Stones, trees and earth all become seeds of virtue.

Again, an over-punctilious person
Knows not how to relax;
A gluttonous dog knows not what is hunger;
A brazen Guru knows not what is fear.

Rich men are wretched creatures with their money,
Poor men are wretched creatures without money.
Alas, with, or without money, both are miserable!
Happiness will come, dear children,
If you can practise the Dharma.
Remember then, my words, and practise with perseverance.

(p. 665)

19

"It is very true that human beings suffer like this," agreed the disciples. "Now please tell us about the sufferings in the three miserable realms, even though just to mention them may be distressing. Also, to spur our spiritual efforts, please preach to us of the causes of Hell and its woe." In response, Jetsun sang:

Those who, for meat and blood
Slaughter living beings,
Will in the Eight Hot Hells be burned.
But if they can remember the Good Teachings,
Soon will they be emancipated.

Ruthless robbers who strike and kill,
Wrongly eating others' food
While clinging to their own with greed,
Will fall into the Eight Cold Hells.
Yet if they do not hold wrong views against the Dharma
It is said that their time for deliverance will come.
(The Holy Scriptures) also say
Whene'er the denizens of hell
Recall the name of Buddha,
Delivered will they be immediately.

Ever repeating sinful deeds means
Dominance by vice and evil Karma.
Fiends filled with the craving for pleasures,
Murder even their parents and Gurus,
Rob the Three Gems of their treasure,
Revile and accuse falsely the Precious Ones,
And condemn the Dharma as untrue;
In the Hell-of-unceasing-torment[23]
These evil doers will be burned;

Far from them alas, is Liberation.
This, my sons, will certainly distress you,
So into Dharma throw your hearts
And devote yourselves to meditation!

(p. 666)

20

"For the benefit of sentient beings, please tell us now about the sufferings of the *Hungry Ghosts.*" In reply, Milarepa sang:

Hungry Ghosts, seeing all forms as foes,
Run from each successive terror.
Wild beasts fight and eat each other.
Who of them is to blame?
The sufferings of the Hungry Ghosts
Grow from their stinginess.
Like a rat is he who fails
To give alms when he is rich,
Begrudges food when he has plenty,
Gives no food to others, but checks
Them over, counts and stores them –
Discontented day and night.
At the time of death he sees
That his hard-earned wealth
Will be enjoyed by others.

Caught in Bardo[24] by the agony of loss,
As a Hungry Ghost he lives his life.
Due to his delusive thoughts
He suffers thirst and hunger.
When he sees his goods enjoyed by others

He is tormented by avarice and hate.
Again and again will he thus fall down (to Hell).
I, the great Yogi of Strength,
Now sing for you the woes
Of Hungry Ghosts. Dear sons
And disciples here assembled, think on
My words and meditate with perseverance!

(p. 667)

21

Shiwa Aui then requested, "Now please tell us of the sufferings of *animals*." Whereupon Milarepa sang:

Animals, alas, are ignorant and benighted;
Most stupid men will incarnate amongst them.
Blind and enslaved by evil Karma,
The ignorant know not Dharma's Truth.
Blind both to evil and to virtue,
They quickly waste their lives away.
Unable to reason and use symbols,
They act like blind automations;
Unable to distinguish wrong from right,
Like maniacs, they do much wrong.
Some people even say 'tis good
(To be an animal);
Since it does neither regret nor repent,
Alas! How foolish is this thought!
Then, all stupid life-takers
Will incarnate as beasts;
The fools who know not right from wrong,

And those who harbour vicious thoughts,
Will incarnate as common brutes.
Hard it is for me to describe
Their Karmas, but think on my words
And cultivate your minds.

(pp. 667-668)

22

Milarepa once took Rechungpa to the market of Nya Non in order to further his spirit of renunciation. Many butchers had gathered there. The meat was piled up like walls, animals' heads were stacked in huge heaps, skins were scattered over the ground, and blood ran together like water in a pond. In addition, rows of livestock were fastened to the stakes for slaughtering.... Whereupon with overwhelming compassion, Milarepa sang:

How pitiful are sentient beings in Samsara!
Looking upward to the Path of Liberation,
How can one feel aught but sorrow for these sinful men.
How foolish and sad it is to indulge in killing,
When by good luck and Karma one has a human form.
How sad it is to do an act
That in the end will hurt oneself.
How sad it is to build a sinful wall
Of meat made of one's dying parents' flesh?[25]
How sad it is to see
Meat eaten and blood flowing.
How sad it is to know confusions
And delusions fill the minds of men.

How sad it is to find but vice,
Not love, in peoples' hearts.
How sad it is to see
That Blindness veils all men
Who cherish sinful deeds.

Craving causes misery,
While worldly deeds bring pain.
With this in mind one feels sorrowful,
Thinking thus, one searches for a cure.
When I think of those who never
Take heed for their future lives,
But indulge in evil deeds,
I feel most disturbed and sad,
And deeply fearful for them.
Rechungpa, seeing all these things,
Don't you remember Holy Dharma?
Don't you in Samsara lose all heart?
Rouse the spirit of renunciation,
Go, Rechungpa, to the cave to meditate!

Heed the bounty of your Guru
And avoid all sinful deeds,
Casting worldly things aside
Stay firm in your practice
Keep your good vows
And devote your life to meditation.

(pp. 566–567)

23

A very beautiful girl of about fifteen years of age, whose name was Bardarbom said to Milarepa: "By merely meeting you I shall have accumulated a great deal of merit" and begged to be taken as his servant and disciple. Milarepa replied, "if you seriously want to practise the Dhamma, you must learn that worldly affairs are your enemies and renounce them." And he sang a song called...

The Four Renunciations

Listen, you fortunate girl,
You who have wealth and faith!

Future lives last longer than this life –
Do you know how to make provision?
Giving with niggardly heart
As if feeding a strange watch-dog,
Only brings more harm than good –
Bringing nothing in return but a vicious bite,
Renounce parsimony, now that you know its evil.

Listen, you fortunate girl!
We know less of this life than the next one.
Have you prepared and lit your lamp?
Should it not be ready,
Meditate on the "Great Light".
If you choose to help an ungrateful foe,
You will gain not a friend, but damage.
Beware of acting blindly:
Beware of this evil and discard it.

Listen, you fortunate girl.
Future lives are worse than this life –

Have you a guide or escort for your journey?
If you have not the right companion,
Rely on the holy Dharma.
Beware of relatives and kinsmen;
They hinder and oppose (the Dharma).
They never help but only harm one.

Did you know that your kinsmen are your foes?
If this be true, surely you should leave them.

Listen, you fortunate girl.
The journey in the future life
    is more hazardous than this one –
Have you prepared a fine horse of perseverance for it?
If not, you should strive hard and work with diligence.
The excitement of the start will soon diminish;
Beware the foe, "Inertness"[26], which makes one go astray.
Of no avail are hurry and excitement, which only harm one.
Do you yet know that your enemies are laziness and caprice?
If you understand my words,
    you should cast them both away.

(pp. 145–146)

24

Going to Bardarbom's house for alms, Milarepa encountered "an ugly old woman with a handful of ashes". She rushed at him, shouting, "You miserable yogi-beggars! I never see you in one place! In the summer you all show up begging for milk and butter! In the winter you all come for grain! I'll wager you wanted to sneak in to steal my daughter's and daughter-in-law's jewellery!" Grumbling and trembling with rage, she was about to throw the ashes at Milarepa, when he said, "Wait a minute, grandmother! Please listen to me!" He then sang…

A Song with Nine Meanings

Above is the auspicious Heaven,
Below are the Three Paths of Misery,
In between, are those who are not free
to choose their birth.[27]

These three all converge on you.
Grandmother, you are an angry woman,
And dislike the Dharma!
Question your own thoughts and your mind examine.
You should practise the Buddha's Teaching,
You need a qualified and dependable Guru,
Think carefully, dear lady;
When you were first sent here,
Did you dream that you would become an old nanny-goat?

In the morning you get up from bed,
In the evening you go to sleep,
In between, you do the endless housework;
You are engrossed in these three things.
Grandmother, you are an unpaid maid.
Question your own thoughts and your mind examine.
You should practise the Buddha's Teaching,
You need a qualified and dependable Guru,
And then things may be different for you.

The head of the family is the most important one,
Income and earnings are the next most longed-for things,
Then sons and nephews are wanted most.
By these three you are bound
Grandmother, for yourself you have no share.
Question your own thoughts and your mind examine.
You should practise the Buddha's Teaching,
You need a qualified and dependable Guru,
And then things may be different for you.

Attaining what you want even though you steal,
Getting what you desire even though you rob,
Fighting your foe without regard to death and wounds,
To these three things you are subjected.

Grandmother, you are burned up with fury
When you come upon your foe.
Question your own thoughts and your mind examine.
You should practise the Buddha's Teaching,
You need a qualified and dependable Guru,
And then things may be different for you.

Gossip about other women and their manners
Is what interests you;
To the affairs of your own son and nephew
You pay attention,
To talk of widows and relatives is your delight.
These three things enchant you.
Grandmother, are you so gentle when you gossip?
Question your own thoughts and your mind examine.
You should practise the Buddha's Teaching,
You need a qualified and dependable Guru,
And then things may be different for you.

To lift you from a chair is like pulling out a peg;
With feeble legs you waddle like a thieving goose;
Earth and stone seem to shatter when you drop into a seat;
Senile and clumsy is your body,
Grandmother, you have no choice but to obey.
Question your own thoughts and your mind examine.
You should practise the Buddha's Teaching,
What you require is a qualified and dependable Guru,
And from that you may find out how you have changed.
Your skin is creased with wrinkles;
Your bones stand out sharply from your shrunken flesh,

You are deaf, dumb, imbecile, eccentric and tottering;
You are thrice deformed.
Grandmother, your ugly face is wrapped in wrinkles.
Question your own thoughts and your mind examine.
You should practise the Buddha's Teaching,
You need a qualified and dependable Guru,
And then things may be different for you.

Your food and drink are cold and foul;
Your coat is heavy and in rags;
Your bed so rough it tears the skin;
These three are your constant companions.
Grandmother, you are now a wretch,
half woman and half bitch!
Question your own thoughts and your mind examine!
You should practise the Buddha's Teaching,
What you need is a qualified and dependable Guru,
And then things may be different for you.

To attain higher birth and Liberation
Is harder than to see a star in daytime;
To fall into Samsara's wretched path
Is easy and often happens.
Now, with fear and grief at heart,
You watch the time of death draw nigh.
Grandmother, can you face death with confidence?
Question your own mind and your thoughts examine!
What you need is to practise the Teaching of the Buddha,
What you need is a qualified and dependable Guru.

(pp. 136–139)

25

Milarepa said to his faithful patroness, Shindormo, "My dear patroness, except for advanced Dharma practitioners, the pains of birth, decay, illness and death descend upon everyone. It is good to think about and fear them, because this enables one to practise the Dharma when death is approaching." Whereupon he sang:

In the river of birth, decay, illness,
And death we worldly beings are submerged;
Who can escape these pains on earth?
We drift on with the tide.
Amidst waves of misery and darkness
We flow on and on.
Seldom in Samsara can one find joy.

More miseries come by trying to avoid them;
Through pursuing pleasures one's sins increase.
To be free from pain,
Wrong deeds should be shunned.
When death draws near, the wise
Always practise Dharma.

(p. 552)

26

"I do not know how to observe the suffering of birth," said Shindormo, "Please instruct me how to meditate upon it." In answer, the Jetsun sang:

My faithful patroness, I will
Explain the suffering of birth.
The wanderer in the Bardo plane
Is the Alaya Consciousness[28]
Driven by lust and hatred
It enters a mother's womb.

Therein it feels like a fish
In a rock's crevice caught,
Sleeping in blood and yellow fluid,
It is pillowed in discharges,
Crammed in filth, it suffers pain.
A bad body from a bad Karma is born.

Though remembering past lives,
It cannot say a single word.
Now scorched by heat,
Now frozen by the cold,
In nine months it emerges
From the womb in pain excruciating,
As if pulled out gripped by pliers.
When from the womb its head is squeezed,
The pain is like being thrown into a bramble pit.
The tiny body on the mother's lap,
Feels like a sparrow grappled by a hawk.
When from the baby's tender body
The blood and filth are being cleansed,
The pain is like being flayed alive.
When the umbilical cord is cut,
It feels as though the spine was severed.
When wrapped in the cradle it feels bound
By chains, imprisoned in a dungeon.

He who realizes not the truth of No-arising[29]
Never can escape from the dread pangs of birth.

There is no time to postpone devotion:
When one dies one's greatest need
is the divine Dharma.
You should then exert yourself
To practise Buddha's Teaching.

(pp. 553–554)

27

Shindormo asked again, "Please preach for us the sufferings of *old age*." In response, the Jetsun sang:

Listen, my good patrons, listen
To the sufferings of old age.

Painful is it to see one's body
Becoming frail and quite worn out.
Who can help but feel dismayed
At the threat of growing old?
When old age descends upon one,
One's straight body becomes bent;
When one tries to step firmly,
One staggers against one's will;
One's black hairs turn white.
One's clear eyes grow dim;
One's head shakes with dizziness,
And one's keen ears turn deaf,
One's ruddy cheeks grow pale,
And one's blood dries up.

One's nose – the pillar of one's face – sinks in;
One's teeth – the essence of one's bones – protrude.
Losing control of tongue, one stammers.

On the approach of death,
    one's anguish and debts grow.
One gathers food and friends,
But one cannot keep them,
Trying not to suffer,
One only suffers more,
When one tells the truth to people,
Seldom is one believed;
The sons and nephews one has raised
And cherished, often become one's foes.
One gives away one's savings,
But wins no gratitude.
Unless you realize the truth of Non-decay,[30]
You will suffer misery in old age.
He who when old neglects the Dharma,
Should know that he is bound by Karma.
It is good to practise
The divine Dharma while you can still breathe.

(pp. 554–555)

28

Shindormo then said, "What you have just told us is very true; I have experienced these things myself. Now please preach for us the sufferings of *sickness*." In reply, Milarepa sang:

Dear patrons, you who know grief and sorrow,
Listen to the miseries of sickness.

This frail body is subject e'er to sickness,
So that one suffers excruciating pain.
The illnesses of Prana (mind), gall and phlegm[31]
Constantly invade this frail human body,

Causing its blood and matter to be heated;
The organs are thus gripped by pain.
In a safe and easy bed
The sick man feels no comfort,
But turns and tosses, groaning in lament.
Through the Karma of (past) meanness,
Though with best of food you feed him,
He vomits all that he can take.
When you lay him in the cool,
He still feels hot and burning;
When you wrap him in warm cloth,
He feels cold as though soaked in sleet.
Though friends and kinsmen gather round,
None can relieve or share his pains
Though warlocks and physicians are proficient,
They cannot help cases caused by Ripening Karma.

He who has not realized the truth of No-illness[32]
Much suffering must undergo.

Since we know not when sickness will strike,
It is wise to practise Holy Dharma –
The sure conqueror of illness!

(p. 555)

29

"I hope to practise (more) Dharma when death draws near," said Shindormo. "Now please preach for me the suffering of *death.* " In answer, Milarepa sang:

Listen, my disheartened patroness:
Like the pain of repaying compound debts,

One must undergo the suffering of death,
Yama's guards catch and carry one
When the time of death arrives.
The rich man cannot buy it off with money,
With his sword the hero cannot conquer it,
Nor can the clever woman outwit it by a trick.
Even the learned scholar cannot
Postpone it with his eloquence.
Here, the unlucky cannot make appeal,
Nor can a brave man here display his valour.

When all the Nadis[33] converge in the body,
One is crushed as if between two mountains –

All vision and sensation become dim.
When Bon[34] priests and diviners become useless,
The trusted physician yields to his despair.
None can communicate with the dying man,
Protecting guards and devas vanish into nought.
Though the breath has not completely stopped,
One can all but smell the stale odour of dead flesh.
Like a lump of coal in chilly ashes
One approaches to the brink of death.

When dying, some still count the dates and stars;
Others cry and shout and groan;
Some think of worldly goods;
Some, that their hard-earned wealth
Will be enjoyed by others.

However deep one's love, or great one's sympathy,
He can but depart and journey on alone.
His good friend and consort
Can only leave him there;
In a bundle his beloved body
Will be folded[35] and carried off,

Then thrown in water, burned in fire,
Or simply cast off in a desolate land.
Faithful patrons, what in the end can we retain?
Must we sit idly by and let all things go?
When your breath stops tomorrow
No wealth on earth can help you.
Why, then, should one be mean?
Kind kinsmen circle round
The bed of the dying,
But none can help him for a moment.
Knowing that all must be left behind,
One realizes that all great love
And attachment must be futile
When that final moment comes,
Only Holy Dharma helps.

You should strive, dear patroness,
For a readiness to die!
Be certain and ready and when the time comes,
You will have no fear and no regret.

(pp. 556–557)

30

A married couple of the village Mang Yul, had no children and invited Milarepa to their house when he came that way for alms. They sought to adopt him into their family and said: "We have a good strip of land which we can give you; you can then marry an attractive woman, and soon you will have relatives." Milarepa replied, "I have no need of these things and I will tell you why:"

Home and land at first seem pleasant;
But they are like a rasp filing away
one's body, word and mind!
How toilsome ploughing and digging can become!
And when the seeds you planted never sprout,
You have worked for nought!
In the end it becomes a land of misery –
Desolate and unprotected –
A place for hungry spirits, and of haunting ghosts!
When I think of the warehouse
For storing sinful deeds,
It gnaws at my heart,
In such a prison of transiency I will not stay,
I have no wish to join your family!

(pp. 119–120)

31

At first, when a man greets his relatives,
He is happy and joyful; with enthusiasm
He serves, entertains and talks to them.
Later, they share his meat and wine.
He offers something to them once, they may reciprocate.

In the end, they cause anger, craving and bitterness;
They are a fountain of regret and unhappiness.
With this in mind, I renounce pleasant and sociable friends;
For kinsmen and neighbours, I have no appetite.

(pp. 121–122)

32

Wealth, at first, leads to self-enjoyment,
Making other people envious.
However much one has, one never feels it is enough,
Until one is bound by the miser's demon;
Hard it is then to spend it on virtuous deeds.

Wealth provokes enemies and stirs up ghosts.
One works hard to gather riches which others will spend;
In the end, one struggles for life and death,
To amass wealth and money invites enemies;
So I renounce the delusions of Samsara.
To become the victim of deceitful devils,
I have no appetite.

(p. 122)

33

The Jetsun was about to leave Nya Non for other hermitages, but the patrons of that place besought him to stay with the utmost earnestness. The Jetsun replied: "If I do not die, I shall try to come back to your village. If for some time we cannot see each other, try at times to remember and practise these things." Whereupon he sang:

Alas, how pitiful are worldly things!
Like precious jade they cherish
Their bodies, yet like ancient trees
They are doomed in the end to fall.
Sometimes bridle your wild thoughts
And pay heed to the Dharma.

Though you gather wealth
As hard as bees collect their honey,
The ills that upon you may fall
Can never be foretold,
Sometimes bridle your wild thoughts
And pay heed to the Dharma.

One may offer to a Lama[36]
Loads of silk for many years;
But when an ill-fortune descends,
Like a fading rainbow
One's faith at once dissolves.
Sometimes bridle your wild thoughts
And pay heed to the Dharma.

Like a pair of mated beasts,
Lovers live together,
But calamity by the wolf's attack
May fall on you at any time.
Sometimes bridle your wild thoughts
And pay heed to the Dharma.

You may cherish your dear son,
Like a hen hatching her egg;
But a falling rock may crush it at any time.
Sometimes bridle your wild thoughts
And pay heed to the Dharma.

A face may be as pretty as a flower,
Yet at any time it can be spoiled by violent hail.
Think at times of how this world
Is sorry, transient and futile.

Though son and mother have affection
For each other, when discords arise,
Like foes they clash and quarrel,

Sometimes towards all sentient beings
You should feel compassion.

Basking in the warm sunlight
May be pleasant and a comfort,
But a storm of woe may rise
And choke you at any time,
Remember sometimes the deprived,
And give alms to those in need.

Oh, dear men and women patrons,
For him who cannot practise Dharma,
All his life will be meaningless,
All his acts wrong-doings!

(pp. 627–628)

34

"When the Jetsun Milarepa was staying in the Stone House of Drin, Tsese, Ku Ju, and many other patrons came to him for the Dharma. Tsese said, "Please give us some Buddhist Teaching that is easy for us to understand." Milarepa replied, "Very well, lend your ears and listen carefully to this song."

Dear patrons, with care listen
For a moment to my words.

Superior men have need of Dharma;
Without it, they are like eagles –
Even though perched on high,
They have but little meaning.

Average men have need of Dharma;
Without it, they are like tigers –
Though possessing greatest strength,
They are of little value.

Inferior men have need of Dharma;
Without it, they are like a peddler's asses –
Though they carry a big load,
It does them but little good.

Superior women need the Dharma;
Without it, they are like pictures on a wall –
Though they look very pretty,
They have no use or meaning.

Average women need the Dharma;
Without it they are like little rats –
Though they are clever at getting food,
Their lives have but little meaning.

Inferior women need the Dharma;
Without it, they are just like vixens –
Though they be deft and cunning,
Their deeds have little value.

Old men need the Dharma;
Without it, they are like decaying trees.
Growing youths the Dharma need;
Without it, they are like yoked bulls.
Young maidens need the Dharma,
Without it, they are but decorated cows.
All young people need the Dharma;
Without it, they are as blossoms
Shut within a shell.
All children need the Dharma;
Without it, they are as robbers possessed by demons.

Without the Dharma, all one does
Lacks meaning and purpose.
Those who want to live with meaning
Should practise the Buddha's Teaching.

(pp. 653–654

35

The King of Ye Rang and Ko Kom (in Nepal) had heard of Milarepa and sent his envoy to invite the Jetsun to Nepal. As he declined to go the envoy expostulated that his Lord had got nothing except the envoy's empty hands and thorn-pricked feet. To this the Jetsun replied, "I am the great Universal Emperor. There is no other emperor who is happier, richer or more powerful than I." The envoy retorted, "If you claim that you are the great Universal Emperor himself, then you must have Seven Precious Articles of Royalty. [37] Please show me one of them." The Jetsun replied, "If you worldly kings and officers will follow my Royal Way, each of you may also become the Supreme Emperor, and thus be rich and noble." Whereupon he sang:

If you kings and courtiers who seek pleasures,
Follow the Royal Succession of Milarepa,
Eventually you will obtain them.

This is the Royal Succession of Milarepa:
My faith is the Royal Precious Wheel
Revolving 'round the virtues day and night.
My wisdom is the Royal Precious Gem
Fulfilling all the wishes of myself and others.

The discipline's observance
    is my Royal Precious Queen;
She is my adornment, one most beautiful.
Meditation is my Royal Precious Minister;
With him I accumulate the Two Provisions.[38]
Self-inspection is my Royal Precious Elephant,
Which takes responsibility for Buddhist Dharma.

Diligence is my Royal Precious Horse,
Which bears the Klesas to Non-ego Land.
Study and contemplation is my Royal Precious General
Who destroys the enemy of vicious thoughts.

If you have these Royal Precious Trappings,
You will gain a king's fame and prosperity,
And conquer all your foes.
You may then spread the Ten Virtues[39] in your dominion,
And urge all mother-like[40] sentient beings
To follow my noble teachings.

(p. 290)

36

At Gung Tang Castle, some men were building a house and Milarepa approached them for alms. Saying that they had no time and were busy while he appeared to be idle, they invited him to join in their house construction. But Milarepa declined to work upon worldly building, for he said his house was already constructed in his own way. The men asked him, "How did you build your house, and why do you spurn our work so strongly?" Milarepa sang in reply:

Faith is the firm foundation of my house,
Diligence forms the high walls,
Meditation makes the huge bricks,
And Wisdom is the great corner-stone.
With these four things I build my castle,
And it will last as long as the Truth eternal!
Your worldly houses are delusions,
Mere prisons for the demons,
And so I would abandon and desert them.

(p. 106)

37

Some demons had come to afflict Milarepa, but after he had sung two songs to them they began to turn towards the Dharma. They said: "We are most grateful for your preaching on the truth of Karma. In all frankness, we are of limited intelligence and limitless ignorance. Our minds are steeped in a morass of stubborn habitual thoughts. Pray, therefore, teach us a lesson profound in meaning, great in profit, and simple in comprehension and observation." Milarepa then sang...

The Song of the Seven Truths

However beautiful a song's words may be,
It is but a tune to those
Who grasp not the words of Truth.
If a parable agrees not with the Buddha's Teaching,
However eloquent it may sound,
'Tis but a booming echo.
If one does not practise Dharma,

However learned in the Doctrines one may claim to be,
One is only self-deceived.
Living in solitude is self-imprisonment,
If one practises not the instruction
of the Oral Transmission.[41]
Labour on the farm is but self-punishment,
If one neglects the teaching of the Buddha.

For those who do not guard their morals,
Prayers are but wishful thinking.
For those who do not practise what they preach,
Oratory is but faithless lying.
Wrong-doing shunned, sins of themselves diminish;
Good deeds done and merit will be gained.
Remain in solitude, and meditate alone,
Much talking is of no avail,
Follow what I sing, and practise Dharma!

(pp. 16–17)

38

The people of Nya Non, hearing that Milarepa had decided to go, brought him good offerings and besought him to stay. However, Milarepa replied, "I am going to another place to await the coming of my death. If I do not die soon, there will always be a chance for us to meet again. In the meantime, you should all try to practise these things", and he sang to them of the Six Paramita[42] and their applications:

Obeisance to my perfect Guru!
Property and possessions
Are like dew on the grass –
Give them away without avarice.

A human body that can practise Dharma
is most precious –
(To attain it again), you should keep the precepts well
As if protecting your own eyes!

Anger brings one to the Lower Realms,
So, never lose your temper,
Even though your life be forfeit.

Inertia and slackness
Never bring accomplishment –
Exert yourself therefore in devotion.

Through distractions Mahayana[43]
Can never be understood
Practise therefore concentration.

Since Buddhahood cannot be won without,
Watch the nature of your mind within.

Like fog is faith unstable
When it starts to fade, you should
Strengthen it more than ever.

(pp. 626–627)

39

Milarepa cautioned his disciple Rechungpa to live as he had lived, saying, "You also should renounce all Eight Worldly Desires (or Winds)[44] and meditate hard while you still have the chance. Now hearken to my song."

Remember how your Guru lived
And bear in mind his honeyed words.

He who wastes a chance for Dharma,
Will never have another.

Bear, then, in mind the Buddha's Teaching
And practise it with perseverance,
By clinging to things of this life,
In the next, one suffers more.
If you crave for pleasures
Your troubles but increase.

One is indeed most foolish
To miss a chance for Dharma.
Practise hard in fear of death!
Committing sins will draw
You to the Lower Realms.
By pretending and deceiving,
You cheat and mislead yourself.
Merits diminish
With the growth of evil thoughts.
If you are concerned with future life,
Diligently practise your devotions
A yogi longing for good clothes
Will soon lose his mind;
A yogi yearning for good food
Will soon do bad deeds;
A yogi loving pleasant words
Will not gain, but lose.
Renounce worldly pursuits, Rechungpa,
Devote yourself to meditation.

If you try to get a patron
Who is rich, you will meet a foe.
He who likes to be surrounded
By crowds, will soon be disappointed
He who hoards much wealth and money,
Soon is filled with vicious thoughts.

Meditate, my son Rechungpa,
And put your mind into the Dharma.

Realization will be won
At last by him who practises;
He who cannot practise
But only talks and brags,
Is always telling lies.
Alas, how hard it is to find
The chance and time to practise long
Rechungpa, try to meditate without diversions.

If you merge your mind with Dharma,
You will e'er be gay and joyful;
You will always find it better
If oft you dwell in solitude.
Son Rechungpa, may the precious
Illuminating-Void Samadhi
Remain forever in your mind!

(pp. 564–566)

40

Rechungpa had a wish to visit Central Tibet (Weu) but Milarepa tried to dissuade him from going by saying that it was not yet the right time for him to leave his Guru. But Rechungpa still kept pressing his request. Whereupon the Jetsun sang:

It is good for you, the white lion on the mountain,
To stay high, and never go deep into the valley,
Lest your beautiful mane be sullied!
To keep it in good order,
You should remain on the high snow mountain.
Rechungpa, hearken to my words today!

It is good for you, the great eagle, on high rocks
To perch, and never fall into a pit,
Lest your mighty wings be damaged!
To keep them in good order,
You should remain in the high hills.
Rechungpa, hearken to your Guru's words!

It is good for you, the jungle tiger,
To stay in the deep forest: if you rove
About the plain, you will lose your dignity!
To keep your splendour in perfection,
In the forest you should remain.
Rechungpa, hearken to your Guru's words!

It is good for you, the golden-eyed fish,
To swim in the central sea;
If you swim too close to the shore,
You will in a net be caught.
You should remain in the deep waters.
Rechungpa, hearken to your Guru's words!
It is good for you, Rechungdordra of Gung Tang,
For you to stay in hermitages;
If you wander in different places,
Your experience and realization will dim.
To protect and cultivate devotion
You should remain in the mountains.
Rechungpa, hearken to your Guru's words!

(p. 587)

41

Drashi Tse, a patron, once asked Milarepa: "Do you think I should concentrate my effort on meditation alone or not?" The Jetsun replied, "It is for the very sake of practice that the Dharma is preached and studied. If one does not practise or meditate, both studying and preaching will be meaningless."

Hearken, my faithful patrons!
Even sinful persons,
Not knowing the great power of Karma,
Dream of achieving Liberation,
Life wears out as days and years go by,
Yet in pursuing pleasures
People spend their lives.
They ask, will this month or year be good?"
Blind to life's speedy passing,
Fools cherish foolish questions.
He who truly wants to practise Dharma
Should make offerings to the Holy Ones,
Take Refuge in the Triple Gem,
Give service to the Jetsun Guru,
Pay respect to his parents,
Give alms without hoping for reward.
He should offer help to those in need,
He should live and act up to The Dharma's principles.
Not much is needed for Buddhist practice;
Too many vows lead to self-cheating.
Dear patrons, try to practise what I say.

(p. 650–651)

»«»«

Milarepa said: "Many people think that they will have ample time to practise the Dharma, but without their notice or expectation, death suddenly descends upon them and they lose forever the chance to practise. What then can they do? One should turn all one's Buddhist knowledge inside one's mouth, and then meditate. If one does not further one's studies and meditation at the same time, but thinks that one should first learn a great deal before starting the actual practice (one will be completely lost) because knowledge is infinite, and there is no possibility of mastering it all."

(p. 650)

42

Some patrons had made copious offerings to the young and handsome Rechungpa before his departure for Weu but had offered his old Teacher, the Jetsun, only third-rate provisions. Milarepa came to know of this and shamed them to their faces, whereupon they felt guilt and deep regret. One day they came again and brought excessive offerings saying, "Please sing for us to awaken our insight into the transiency of beings." Milarepa would not accept their offerings but he sang this for them:

Hearken you mean patrons!
For the sake of fame, to do
Meritorious deeds –
For this life's sake to seek
The protection of Buddha –
To give alms for the sake
Of returns and dividends –

To serve and offer for the sake
Of vanity and pride –
These four ways will never requite one!

For the sake of gluttony
To hold a sacramental feast[45] –
For the sake of egotism
To strive for Sutra-learning –
For distraction and amusement
To indulge in foolish talk and song –
For vain glory's sake
To give the Initiations[46] –
These four ways will never bring one blessings!

If for love of preaching one expounds
Without the backing of scripture,
If through self-conceit,
One accepts obeisance;
If like a bungling, fumbling fool one teaches,
Not knowing the disciple's capacity,
If to gather money one behaves
Like a Dharma practiser –
These four ways can never help the welfare of sentient beings!
To prefer diversions to solitude,
To love pleasures and hate hardship,
To crave for talk when urged to meditate,
To wallow arrogantly in the world –
These four ways will never bring one to Liberation!

This is the song of Fourfold Warning
Dear patrons, bear it in your minds!

(pp. 601–602)

43

Rechungpa had just returned from India complete with new learning, instructions in various meditations, skill in logic, and a swollen head. In order to clear up Rechungpa's pride and arrogance, Milarepa sang:

...Oh, my son, your pride in what you learned
Will lead you well astray!

To preach a lot, with empty words,
Ruins your good experience and meditation.

To be swollen with pride and arrogance
Proves you have betrayed the Guru's precepts.
Nothing gives cause for more regret
Than disobedience to the Guru
No one is more distracted and confused
Than he who ceases to meditate in solitude.
Nothing is more fruitless
Than a Buddhist[47] who renounces not his kin.
Nothing is more shameful
Than a learned Buddhist who neglects his meditation.
Nothing is more disgraceful
Than a monk who violates the rules.

(p. 425 extract)

44

More advice sung by Milarepa to try to cure Rechungpa's pride:

It is fine that father and son are in harmony –
Maintaining harmony with people is a great merit;
But the best merit is to keep in harmony
with one's father.
If one is discordant with all the people he knows
He must be a person ominous or obnoxious.
Yet even more ominous is discord between father and son.

Good it is to maintain harmony with one's
father by right deeds,
Good it is to repay one's mother's kindness and bounties,
Good it is to act in concord with all.

One's wish can be fulfilled
If one is on good terms with one's brothers,
To please one's Guru
Is to gain his blessings;
To be humble is to succeed
A good Buddhist is one who conquers all bad dispositions.

Kindness, is toleration of slanders;
To be modest is to gain fame and popularity;
To maintain pure discipline
Is to do away with pretence and concealment;
To live with a sage is to gain improvement;
To be indifferent is to stop all gossip;
To be good and compassionate is to advance
one's Bodhi-mind.
These are things that a wise man should do,
But a fool can never distinguish friend from foe.

(pp. 426–427 extract)

45

Another exhortation to Rechungpa not to go as yet to Weu:

Listen, Rechung Dorjedrapa,
The well-learned Buddhist scholar.
Listen, and think with care on what I say,
Before faith and yearning arise for Dharma,
Beg not alms for mere enjoyment.
Before you have realized primordial Truth,
Boast not of your sublime philosophy.
Before you have fully mastered the Awareness within,
Engage not in blind and foolish acts.
Before you can feed on the Instructions,
Involve yourself not in wicked occultism.[48]
Before you can explain the profound Teaching,
Be not beguiled by partial knowledge.
Before you can increase your merits,
Dispute not over others' goods.
Before you can destroy your inner cravings,
Treat not charity as if it were your right.
Before you can stop projecting habitual thoughts,
Guess not when you make predictions.
Before you have gained Supreme Enlightenment,
Assume not that you are a venerable Lama,
Before you can master all virtues and practices,
Consider not leaving your Guru.
Son Rechungpa, it is better not to go, but stay!

(pp. 588–589)

46

A yogi of Gu Tang, who had great faith in the Jetsun, requested meditation instructions. After these had been given he said: "To help ignorant men like us, pray now, instruct us in the practice of the *Six Paramitas*." [49] Milarepa sang in reply:

Property and wealth are like dew on grass;
Knowing this, gladly should one give them away. (*charity*)

It is most precious to be born a leisured and
worthy human being,
Knowing this, one should with care observe the precepts
As if protecting one's own eyes. (*moral discipline*)

Anger is the cause of falling to the Realms Below;
Knowing this, one should refrain from wrath,
Even at the risk of life. (*patience*)

Benefit to oneself and to others
Can never be achieved through sloth;
Strive, therefore, to do good deeds. (*diligence*)

A perturbed, wandering mind
Never sees the truth of Mahayana; [50]
Practise, therefore, concentration. (*meditation*)

The Buddha cannot be found through searching;
So contemplate your own mind. (*wisdom*)

Until the autumn mists dissolve into the sky,
Strive on with faith and determination.

(p. 100)

47

Two scholar-bhikkhus came to argue about the Dharma with Milarepa but the discussion (which was a demonstration of his mastery of meditation) turned against them. Upon which, one of them asked for his instruction in the Six Paramitas. In answer, Milarepa sang:

If from parsimony one cannot free oneself,
What is the use of discussing charity? (*dana*)
If one does not forswear hypocrisy and pretence,
What is the use of keeping discipline? (*sila*)
If one abjures not malicious revilings,
What is the use of exercising
    pretentious "patience"? (*khanti*)
If one abandons not indifference and inertness,
What is the use of swearing to be Moral? (*viriya*)
If one conquers not the errant thoughts within,
What is the use of toiling in meditation? (*samadhi*)
If one does not see all forms as helpful,
What is the use of practising the Wisdom (*pañña*)
If one knows not the profound teaching
Of forbidding and allowing,
What is the use of learning?

If one knows not the art of taking and rejecting,
What is the use of speaking on Karma-causation?
If one's mind does not accord with the Dharma,
What is the use of joining the Order?
If the poisonous snake of Klesa[51] is not killed,
The yearning for wisdom only leads to fallacy.
If venomous jealousy is not overcome,
One's yearning for the Bodhi-mind will be an illusion.
If one refrains not from hurting people,

One's longing for respect and honour
Is merely wishful thinking.
If one cannot conquer ego-clinging and prejudice,
One's craving for the Equality of Dharma[52]
Only brings wrong views.
If one cannot subdue the demon, clinging-ego,
One's Klesas will be great and his Yoga bound to fail.
If one's actions conform not with the Dharma.
One will always hinder the good deeds of others.
If one has not yet absorbed one's mind in Dharma,
One's babbling and prattling will only disturb others' minds.
Therefore, do not waste your life in words and chatter
But try to gain the assurance of no-regret
And the confidence of facing death!

(pp. 387–388)

»«»«

Milarepa said: "Dear teachers, the proverb says: 'Judging from the complexion of his face, one knows whether a man has eaten or not'. In the same light, the fact that one knows or knows not the Dharma, can easily be detected by whether or not one can conquer one's own ego-clinging desires. If he can, that proves that one knows and practises the Buddhist Teachings. One may be very eloquent talking about the Dharma and win all the debates, but if one cannot subdue even a fraction of one's ego-clinging and desires, but merely indulges oneself in words and talk, one's victories in debate will never bring one any profit but will only increase one's egotism and pride."

(p. 384)

48

One of the scholar-bhikkhus who had previously been Opposed to the Jetsun, gradually acquired faith in him and eventually came to him for the Dharma, requesting, "Now please be kind enough to instruct me in the essence of the Six Paramitas." In response, the Jetsun sang:

I am not well-versed in words
Being no scholar-preacher,
Yet this petitioner is sincere and good.

The Six Paramitas[53] contain all Buddhist teachings.
To those who practise Dharma,
Wealth is but a cause of diversion.
He who gives his (wealth) all away,
Will be born a Prince of Heaven.
Noble is it to practise charity!
Moral discipline is a ladder to Liberation
Which neither monks nor laymen can discard
All Buddhist followers should practise it!
Buddhist patience, by the Patience-preacher[54]
exemplified,
Is the virtue which the Buddha cherished most
It is a garment difficult to wear,
Yet all merits grow when it is worn.

Diligence is the short path to Freedom
And a necessity for Dharma-practice.
Without it nothing can be done.
Ride then upon the horse of diligence!

These four Dharmas bring merit to men,
Being indispensable for all.
Now I will speak of Wisdom.

Meditation is a teaching between these two,
As it applies both to Wisdom and Merit practice,
By it all distractions are overcome,
For all Buddhist practice, it is most important.

Wisdom-Paramita is the teaching of Final Truth,
The dearest treasure of all Buddhas.
Enjoy it then without exhaustion,
it is the Wish-fulfilling Gem of Heaven,
Fulfilling the hopes of all sentient beings.
To those who can renounce activities,
Wisdom-Paramita will bring final rest.
This provision of Wisdom is most precious;
Whereby one will reach perfection step by step.

This is my reply, Venerable Monk,
Remember and practise it with joy!

(pp. 501–502)

49

Upon Mount Bonbo, Milarepa instructed many Repas who were preparing to depart for meditation in distant hermitages. Those junior Repas who wanted to stay with the Jetsun then said to him, "We are now in an age of defilement. For the sake of inferior and slow-witted persons like us, please preach something appropriate to our needs." In response, Milarepa sang:

Hearken further, my Son-disciples!

At this time of defilement
That shadows the Dharma of Sakyamuni,
One should strive with perseverance,

And carve upon one's mind-stone
The word, "Diligence".
When you feel sleepy during Meditation, try
To pray[55] hard with your awakened body, mouth and mind.
When the fire-spark of Wisdom dims, try
To inflame it with the wind of Mindfulness.
If you want to be freed from Samsara's prison,
Practise hard without diversion.
If to Nirvana you aspire,
Abandon then this world.
If from the depths of your heart
You want to practise Dharma,
Listen to my words and follow in my footsteps.
If you want to consummate the (Supreme)
    Accomplishment,
Never forget that death will come.
If hard and long you meditate, all Buddhas
In the past, the present and the future
Will be well-pleased.
If you are ever straight-forward and upright in the Dharma,
You will receive the grace of your Guru.
If without error you understand these words,
You can be sure that more happiness
And joy will come your way,
For such is my experience.

(pp. 547–548)

50

Some devas invited Milarepa to preach the Dharma in Heaven but he cautioned them saying, "You must know that Heaven is far from dependable; it is not eternal, and one should not rely on it. To be born in heaven is not necessarily a wonderful

thing." The Devas of Heaven said, "In ignorant beings like us, the Kilesas always follow the mind. Pray give us a teaching with which we can correct this fault, so that we may depend upon it and practise it frequently." In response to their request, Milarepa sang:

Should you, oh faithful lady Devas,
    intend to practise the Dharma often,
Inwardly you should practise concentration
    and contemplation.
The renunciation of external affairs is your adornment.
Oh, bear in mind this remedy for external involvement!
With self-composure and mindfulness,
    you should remain serene.
Glory is the equanimity of your mind and speech!
Glory is the resignation from many actions!

Should you meet disagreeable conditions,
Disturbing to your mind,
Keep watch upon yourself and be alert;
Keep warning yourself:
"The danger of anger is on its way".

When you meet with enticing wealth,
Keep watch upon yourself and be alert,
Keep a check upon yourself
"The danger of craving is on its way".

Should hurtful, insulting words come to your ears,
Keep watch upon yourself and be alert,
And so remind yourself:
"Hurtful sounds are but delusions of the ear".

When you associate with your friends,
Watch carefully and warn yourself
"Let not jealousy in my heart arise!"

When you are plied with services and offerings.
Be alert and warn yourself:
"Let me beware lest pride should spring up in my heart!"

At all times, in every way, keep watch upon yourself.
At all times try to conquer evil thoughts within you!
Whatever you may meet in your daily doings,
You should contemplate its void and illusory nature.

Were even one hundred saints and scholars gathered here,
More than this they could not say.
May you all be happy and prosperous!
May you all, with joyful hearts,
Devote yourselves to the practice of the Dharma!

(pp. 92–93)

51

A young shepherd by the name of Sanje Jhap, who was sixteen years old, became interested in knowing what his mind really was. Milarepa tested his ability by instructing him to go for Refuge to the Three Precious Ones and then to visualize a Buddha-image in front of his nose. The boy was not seen for seven days and his father feared that he was dead. They found him in a clay pit sitting upright and asked him why he had not returned home for seven days. The boy said that they must be joking for he had only been there a short time – but it was seven days. While giving him instructions Milarepa sang to him about his mind:

Listen to me, dear shepherd, the protector (of sheep)!
By merely hearing of the taste of sugar,
Sweetness cannot be experienced,

Though one's mind may understand
What sweetness is,
It cannot experience it directly,
Only the tongue can know it.
In the same way, one cannot see in full the nature of mind,
Though he may have a glimpse of it
If it has been pointed out by others[56]
If one relies not on this one glimpse,
But continues searching for the nature of mind,
He will see it fully in the end.
Dear shepherd, in this way you should observe your mind.

(pp. 123–124)

52

Listen to me, young shepherd.
The body is between the conscious and unconscious state,
While the mind is the crucial and decisive factor!
He who feels sufferings in the Lower Realms,
Is the prisoner of Samsara,
Yet it is the mind that can free you from Samsara.
Surely you want to reach the other shore?
Surely you long for the City of Well-being and Liberation?
If you desire to go, dear child,
I can show the Way to you
And give you the instructions.

(pp. 124–125)

53

Upon Rechungpa's return from India, with books on logic incantations from outsiders and much pride, as well as genuine meditation instructions, Milarepa decided to rescue him from this evil and so to welcome him, he sang:

I am a yogi who lives on the snow mountain peak,
With a healthy body I glorify the Mandala of the Whole.[57]
Cleansed of vanity from the Five Poisons,
I am not unhappy;
I feel nought but joy!
Renouncing all turmoil
And fondness for diversion,
I reside alone in perfect ease.
Forswearing the bustle of this world,
Joyfully I stay in no-man's land.
Since I have left embittered family life,
I no longer have to earn and save;
Since I want no books,
I do not intend to be a learned man;
Since I practise virtuous deeds,
I feel no shame of heart.
Since I have no pride or vanity,
I renounce with joy the saliva-splashing debate!
Hypocrisy I have not, nor pretension.
Happy and natural I live
Without forethought or adjustment.
Since I want no fame nor glory,
Rumours and accusations disappear.
Where'er I go, I feel happy,
Whate'er I wear, I feel joyful,
Whatever food I eat, I am satisfied.
I am always happy.

Through Marpa's grace,
I, your old father, Milarepa,
Have realized Samsara and Nirvana.
The Yoga of joy ever fills my hermitage.
Your Repa brothers are well;
On hills remote they make progress in their meditations.
Oh, my son Rechung Dorje Draugpa,
Have you returned from India?
Did you feel tired and weary on the journey?
Has your mind been sharpened and refreshed?
Has your voice been good for singing?
Did you practise and follow your Guru's instructions?
Did you secure the teachings that you wanted?
Did you obtain all the various instructions?
Have you gained much knowledge and much learning?
Have you noticed your pride and egotism?
Are you altruistic in your thoughts and actions?
This is my song of welcoming for you,
On your return.

(pp. 422–423)

54

Five young nuns from Mon had become Milarepa's disciples. Having dwelt with him for some time, they decided to invite him to their village (whence they thought of returning). They said to him: Revered One, since your mind no longer changes, there is no need for you to practise meditation. Therefore, for the sake of sentient beings please come to our village and preach the Dharma for us." Milarepa replied, "Practising meditation in solitude is, in itself, a service to the people. Although my mind no longer changes, it is still a good tradition for a great yogi to remain in solitude." He then sang:

Through the practice (of meditation)
I show gratitude to my Guru.
Pray grant me your grace, ripen and liberate me.

You gifted disciples, followers of Dharma,
Heed carefully, with all attention,
While I sing of the profound Essential Teaching.

The Great Lioness of the upper snow mountain
Poses proudly on the summit of the peak;
She is not afraid –
Proudly dwelling on the mountain
Is the snow lion's way.

The Queen Vulture on Red Rock
Stretches her wings in the wide sky,
She is not afraid of falling –
Flying through the sky is the vulture's way.

In the depths of the great ocean
Darts the Queen of Fish, glittering;
She is not afraid (of drowning) –
Swimming is the fish's way.

On the branches of the oak trees,
Agile monkeys swing and leap,
They are not afraid of falling –
Such is the wild monkey's way.

Under the leafy canopy of the dense wood,
The striped tiger roams and swiftly runs,
Not because of fear or worry –
This shows her haughty pride,
And is the mighty tiger's way.

In the wood on Singa Mountain,
I, Milarepa, meditate on voidness,

Not because I fear to lose my understanding –
Constant meditation is the yogi's way.

...
Those great yogis who have mastered the Practice
Never desire anything in this world.
It is not because they want fame
That they remain in solitude;
It is the natural sign springing from their hearts –
The true feeling of non-attachment and renunciation.

Yogis who practise the teaching of the Path Profound,
Dwell always in caves and on mountains,
Not that they are cynical or pompous,
But to concentrate on meditation is their self-willing.

I, the cotton-clad, have sung many songs,
Not to amuse myself by singing sophistries,
But for your sake, faithful followers who assemble here,
From my heart I have spoken words helpful and profound.

(pp. 81–83 extract)

55

A monk-disciple of Milarepa, Ligor Sharu, wanted the Jetsun to adapt himself somewhat to worldly conventions, so as to win the interest and following of great scholars. Milarepa refused this idea saying that he would ever follow his Guru's instructions to live remotely, and he sang to Ligor Sharu:

I bow down to Marpa, the Translator.

Realizing that fame is as unreal as an echo,
I abandon not the ascetic way of life,
Throwing away all cares and preparations.

Whatever reputation I may have,
I shall always be happy and contented.
Realizing that all things are illusion,
I cast away possessions;
For wealth obtained by strife I have not the least desire!
Whatever my means and prestige,
I shall always be happy and contented.
Realizing that all followers are phantoms,
I have no concern for human relationship
And travel where I please,
Unlike those artificial scholar-priests
Who act with discretion and restraint.[58]
Whatever the status I may have
I shall always be happy and contented.

Realizing that desires and sufferings
Are themselves the Great Equality,[59]
I cut the rope of passion and of hatred.
With or without associates,
I shall always be happy and contented.

The nature of being is beyond play-words;[60]
Attachments to any doctrine or concept
Is merely a matter of self-confusion.
Unshackling the fetter of the knower-and-the-known,
Whatever I become and wherever I remain,
I shall always be happy and contented.

In the great Illuminating Mind itself,
I see no pollution by wandering thoughts.
Throwing away all reasonings and observations,
Whatever words I hear and say,
I shall always be happy and contented.

(pp. 517–518)

56

Rechungpa first went to India to be cured of leprosy, and before he went he sealed up with clay the mouth of the cave where the Jetsun was meditating. When he returned having been cured, people said that the yogi Mila had not been seen for some time. Rechungpa went to the cave and broke down the wall, which was still intact. Milarepa was still in meditation and then sang to him as a greeting:

I bow down at the feet of Marpa, the Gracious One.

Because I have left my kinsmen, I am happy;
Because I have abandoned attachment to my country,
I am happy;
Since I disregard this place,
I am happy;
As I do not wear the lofty garb of priesthood[61],
I am happy;

Because I cling not to house and family, I am happy;
I need not this or that, so I am happy.
Because I possess the great wealth of Dharma, I am
happy; Because I worry not about property, I am happy;
Because I have no fear of losing anything, I am happy;
Since I never dread exhaustion, I am happy;

Having fully realized Mind-Essence[62], I am happy;
As I need not force myself to please my patrons,
I am happy;
Having no fatigue or weariness, I am happy;
As I need prepare for nothing, I am happy;
Since all I do complies with Dharma, I am happy,
Never desiring to move, I am happy;

As the thought of death brings me no fear, I am happy;
Bandits, thieves and robbers never molest me,
So at all times I am happy!
Having won the best conditions for Dharma-practice,
I am happy;
Having ceased from evil deeds and left off sinning,
I am happy;
Treading the Path of Merits, I am happy;
Divorced from hate and injury, I am happy,
Having lost all pride and jealousy, I am happy;
Understanding the wrongness of the Eight Worldly Winds,[63]
I am happy;
Absorbed in quiet and even-mindedness, I am happy
Using the mind to watch the mind, I am happy;
Without hope or fear, I am happy
In the sphere of Non-clinging Illuminations[64]
I am happy;
The Non-distinguishing Wisdom of Dharmadhatu[65]
is itself happy;
Poised in the natural realm of Immanence[66]
I am happy;
In letting the Six Groups of Consciousness go by
To return to their original nature,[67] I am happy;

The five radiant gates of sense all make one happy;
To stop the mind that comes and goes is happy,
Oh, I have so much of happiness and joy!
This is a song of gaiety I sing,
This is a song of gratitude to my Guru and the
Three Precious Ones –
I want no other happiness.

Through the grace of Buddha and the Gurus,
Food and clothes are provided by my patrons.
With no bad deeds and sins,

I shall be joyful when I die;
With all good deeds and virtues,
I am happy while alive.
Enjoying yoga, I am indeed most happy.
But how are you, Rechungpa?
Is your wish fulfilled?

(pp. 110–112)

57

The envoy of the Nepali King, upon meeting him for the first time, was wonderstruck at Milarepa's lack of material possessions and asked him: "Don't you find it hard to live thus without taking nourishing food? Why is it necessary to abandon all belongings?" Milarepa then answered the envoy: "I am the Tibetan yogi, Milarepa. 'Without belongings' means 'without sufferings'." Now listen to my song:

I bow down to all holy Gurus.

I am the man called Milarepa.
For possessions I have no desire.
Since I never strive to make money,
First I do not suffer
Because of making it;
Then I do not suffer
Because of keeping it;
In the end I do not suffer
Because of hoarding it.
Better far and happier is it
Not to have possessions.

Without attachment to kinsmen and companions,
I do not seek affection in companionship,
First I do not suffer
Because of heart-clinging;
Then I do not suffer
From any quarrelling;
In the end I do not suffer
Because of separation.
It is far better to have no affectionate companions.

Since I have no pride and egotism,
I do not look for fame and glory.
First I do not suffer
Because of seeking them;
Then I do not suffer
In trying to preserve them;
In the end I do not suffer
For fear of losing them.
It is far better to have neither fame nor glory.

Since I have no desire for any place,
I crave not to be here, nor there.
First I do not worry
About my home's protection,
Then I do not suffer
From a fervent passion for it;
In the end I am not anxious to defend it.
It is far better to have neither home nor land.

(pp. 288–289)

58

This is the song of Milarepa to some patrons from Drin who were ashamed because of the Jetsun's lack of conventional behaviour:

Through wandering long in many places,
I have forgotten my native land.

Staying long with my Holy Jetsun,
I have forgotten all my kinsmen.
Keeping for long the Buddha's Teaching,
I have forgotten worldly things.
Staying for long in hermitages,
I have forgotten all diversions.
Through long watching of monkeys' play,
I have forgotten sheep and cattle.
Long accustomed to a tinder-box,
I have forgotten all household chores.
Long used to solitude without servant or master,
I have forgotten courteous manners.
Long accustomed to be carefree,
I have forgotten worldly shame.
Long accustomed to the mind coming and going
By itself, I have forgotten how to hide things.
Long used to burning Duma-heat,[68]
I have forgotten clothing.

Long accustomed to practising Non-discriminating Wisdom,
I have forgotten all distracting thoughts.
Long used to practising the Two-in-One Illumination,[69]
I have forgotten all nonsensical ideas.
These twelve 'oblivions' are the teachings of this yogi.
Why, dear patrons, do you not also follow them?
I have untied the knot of dualism;

What need have I to follow your customs.
To me, Bodhi is spontaneity itself!

The Dharma of you worldly people
Is too difficult to practise.
Caring for nought, I live the way I please.
Your so-called 'shame' only brings deceit
And fraud; How to pretend I know not.

(pp. 579–580)

59

In a gathering of patrons, a young man said to Milarepa: "We would like to come to you for instructions; please tell us where your temple is and who provides your sustenance." In answer Milarepa sang:

My temple is an unnamed hermitage,
My patrons are men and women everywhere,
No one can tell where I go or stay.
In the caves where no man comes
I, the yogi, am lost to view.
(When I travel) I carry
Only my Guru's Instructions – lighter
Than feathers, I shoulder them with ease;
More handy than gold, I conceal them where I please,
Stronger than a solid castle,
In all perils they stand firm.
In the three winters I dwell happily in forests;
In the three summers I stay cheerfully on snow mountains;
In the three springs I live with pleasure in the marshes;
In the three autumns I wander joyfully for alms.
In the teaching of my Guru, my mind is always happy;
Singing songs of inspiration, my mouth is always happy,

Wearing cotton from Nepal, my body's always happy.
In delight I accomplish all and everything –
To me there is but cheer and joy.

(pp. 537–538)

60

The patrons of Nya Non wished Milarepa to stay with them permanently. Milarepa replied, "I cannot stay here long, but I will bestow the blessing of long life and good health upon all of you. Also I will make a wish that we meet again under auspicious circumstances conducive to the Dharma." Then he sang:

In the immense blue sky above
Roll on the sun and moon.
Their courses mark the change of time.
Blue sky, I wish you health and fortune,
For I, the moon-and-sun, am leaving
To visit the Four Continents for pleasure.

On the mountain peak is a great rock
'Round which circles oft the vulture,
The King of birds.
Their meeting
And their parting mark the change of time.
Dear rock, be well and healthy, for I,
The vulture, now will fly away
Into the vast space for pleasure.
May lightnings never strike you,
May I not be caught by snares.
Inspired by the Dharma,
May we soon meet again,
In prosperity and boon.

Below in the Tsang River,
Swim fish with golden eyes;
Their meeting and their parting
Mark the change of time.
Dear stream, be well and healthy, for I,
The fish, am going to the Ganges for diversion.
May irrigators never drain you,
May fishermen ne'er net me
Inspired by the Dharma,
May we soon meet again
In prosperity and boon.

In the fair garden blooms the flower, Halo;
Circling round it is the Persian bee.
Their meeting and their parting,
Mark the change of time.
Dear flower, be well and healthy, for I
Will see the Ganges' blooms for pleasure.
May hail not beat down upon you,
May winds blow me not away.
Inspired by the Dharma,
May we soon meet again
In prosperity and boon.

Circling round the Yogi Milarepa
Are the faithful patrons from Nya Non;
Their meeting and their parting
Mark the change of time.
Be well and healthy, dear patrons, as I
Leave for the far mountains for diversion.
May I, the yogi, make good progress,
And you, my patrons, all live long.
Inspired by the Dharma,
May we soon meet again
In prosperity and boon!

(pp. 602–604)

Notes

1 'See "Tibet's Great Yogi, Milarepa", translated by Lama Kazi Dawo-Samdup, edited by Evans-Wentz, published by Oxford University Press. BACK

2 The complete work, from which all the songs reproduced below are extracted, is the "Hundred Thousand Songs of Milarepa", first translated from Tibetan into English by Prof. C. C. Chang, in two volumes, published by the University Books Inc, New Hyde Park, New York. BACK

3 Lama = Acariya or Teacher. It is not the Tibetan equivalent of 'bhikkhu' (which is 'gelong'). Thus in Tibet not all bhikkhus are therefore Lamas. BACK

4 "Three different arts of black magic". Notes in parentheses are quoted from the translation of the Hundred Thousand Songs. BACK

5 In English, we have his "Jewel Ornament of Liberation", translated by H.V. Guenther Rider & Co., London. BACK

6 Translated by Buddharakkhita Thera of Bangalore, India. BACK

7 The Bodhisatta's Vow and Practice to save all sentient beings either in Mundane respect when Voidness has not been realized, or as Transcendental when Suññata has been experienced. His practice includes the Perfections, or those qualities which help one in "crossing over" from Samsara to Nibbana – the Parami(ta). BACK

8 Or Three Realms – of Desire, of Form and of Non-Form. "They include all sentient beings in the various Realms of Samsaric existence." BACK

9 The realm of repeated birth-and-deaths brought into experience by the mistaken conceptions of 'I', 'self', 'ego', and 'soul' as abiding entities. **BACK**

10 Used throughout to express the Buddhist teaching of deeds which bring harm on others (and ruin to oneself). This action is 'unskilful' (akusala) and 'sin' here must be understood in thus sense. **BACK**

11 Delusion; illusory nature of Samsara. **BACK**

12 Virtuous deeds that lead one to Enlightenment. **BACK**

13 The intermediate state of existence between death and rebirth (Skt: *antarabhava, sambbavesi*), but its existence is disputed in Theravada, where rebirth is said to be immediate. The question is complicated by the fact that Time is a relative concept (paññatti) and its perception dependent upon the possession of certain senses. Bardo, according to Tibetan Buddhism, is a very important state, like crossroads, and the fate and fortune of one's rebirth depends much upon it. **BACK**

14 The Lord of Hell before whom, according to some accounts, evil-doers are dragged and tried. Such visions seen by one arising in the Hells are often explained as mental projections appearing very real to those who see them. They are, of course, the fruit (*phala, vipaka*) of unskilful action (*akusala kamma*). **BACK**

15 Of birth, old age, sickness and death. **BACK**

16 A legendary yak ox said to dwell in Heaven. **BACK**

17 Gained by the practice of the Four Arupa Jhanas: Infinity of space, of consciousness, No-thingness, and Neither-perception-nor-non-perception. **BACK**

18 Gained by the practice of the Four Rupa Jhanas. BACK

19 Of Titans (*asura*), Hungry Ghosts (*peta*), Animals, and Hell-wraiths. BACK

20 This is the true nature of mind (*citta-sabhava*) which is anatta, suñña, etc., but is not recognized due to holding ideas of permanence, happiness, ego, etc. BACK

21 The reason why a personality endowed with all the Six Elements (Earth, Water, Fire, Air, Space and Consciousness) can commit all good and evil deeds is implicitly given in the Abhidharmakosa. Sentient beings in rupa- and arupa-realms are not endowed with all six elements, some of them having only two elements or one, thus being incapable of the commission of great evil deeds such as killing, sexual perversion, etc. This is why it is often said that here in this world is the best place either to attain Nirvana or to fall into Realms of Woe, since human beings are endowed with great mental and physical powers partly dependent on the possession of the Six Elements. BACK

22 As for instance, did Lord Buddha to Nanda when leading him to practise the true Dhamma, by first promising him rewards of exquisite pleasures in the heavens of desire. BACK

23 It is said that the denizens of this hell suffer unceasing torment, whereas in other hells, temporary relief of pain is possible. Those who now afflict the Dharma in Tibet should take notice of the inevitable fate in store for persecutors of the Dharma! BACK

24 See **note 7**. BACK

25 All beings have been one's parents at some time or other; see **note 30**. BACK

26 In Pali, *arati* = accidie, spiritual boredom, indifference to what is spiritually skilful. BACK

27 Man is not free to choose where he will be reborn, this being a process depending upon what Karma he has made for himself. BACK

28 The 'Store' Consciousness, the function of which is to preserve the 'seeds' of mental impressions. Memory and learning are made possible because of this consciousness. BACK

29 There is a realm, O bhikkhus,... (where) there is no coming or going or remaining, or deceasing or arising... thus is the end of suffering." (Udana 80–81) BACK

30 See **note 22.** BACK

31 According to Tibetan pathology, these are the three major sicknesses of man. BACK

32 See **note 22.** BACK

33 Channels of spiritual force in the body. BACK

34 The ancient, pre-Buddhist religion of Tibet. BACK

35 It is Tibetan custom to fold the body at the waist and make it into a bundle to be borne away. BACK

36 See note to Introduction (**note 3** in Song 1). BACK

37 For these 7 Possessions of a Righteous Emperor, see Mahasudassana Sutta, Digha Nikaya. BACK

38 Spiritual provisions for Buddhahood: ñana-sambhara (paññaparami) = Provision of Wisdom; puñña-sambhara (the other parami) = Provision of Merits accumulated by way of Compassion. BACK

39 Antithesis of killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, lying, backbiting, harsh speech, nonsensical talk, covetousness, anger and perverted views. BACK

40 All sentient beings may be regarded as one's mothers since as Lord Buddha says: "I see no beginning to beings who, blinded by ignorance and impelled by craving are hurrying through the round of birth." In this way, we have a relationship with all living creatures as they have all been our mothers. BACK

41 Or Whispered Transmission: the Ghagvupa School of Buddhist Practice – **See Introduction.** BACK

42 Or 'Perfections" (see **note** 43). In Northern Buddhist tradition these are six (Giving, Moral Conduct, Patience, Diligence, Meditation, Wisdom) with another four added occasionally. Apart from Meditation the other five are counted among the Perfections in Theravada, which lists ten. Two of these are of Loving-kindness and Equanimity, which would of course fall under Meditation. BACK

43 See **note** 40. BACK

44 See **note** 53. BACK

45 Offerings made to the Buddhas, Bodhisattvas and deities. BACK

46 Instructions for the practice of meditation. BACK

47 A Buddhist bhikkhu or yogi is meant here. BACK

48 As with the other couplets, when one can "feed on the Instructions", has "mastered the Awareness within" etc., one will naturally not be involved in evil and unskilful acts. BACK

49 See note 32, 43. BACK

50 Mahayana here need not be understood in any sectarian sense but means rather the Buddha's Great Way of Wisdom-Compassion, transcending narrow sectarian dogmatism. In contrast to the latter, the Jetsun taught essentially a Way of Practice and Realization. BACK

51 Klesa, Kilesa = Defilement; poison of mind, such as lust, hatred and delusion. BACK

52 Freedom from "all thoughts and conceptualizations, be they simple or complex, good or evil, monistic or dualistic... then one is said to have acquired the wisdom of Equality or Non-discrimination." BACK

53 Sometimes translated 'perfections' but in Chinese and Tibetan as "Reaching-the-other-shore, meaning reaching Nirvana beyond Samsara". BACK

54 See Khantivadi Jataka – No. 313. BACK

55. Using body, mouth and mind in some devotional exercise, such as the 'Long Prostrations' so often and vigorously practised by Tibetans. BACK

56 Sudden insight experienced through the action of the Teacher, either verbally or physically – many well-known cases in Zen Buddhism. BACK

57 It is significant that the words 'holy' and 'whole' are etymologically related. BACK

58 'Artificial' because their scholarship was combined only with a morality of restrictions, thus lacking the essential practice of Dharma. BACK

59 Unenlightened worldly beings discriminate between likes and dislikes, etc., but with Transcendent wisdom (pañña) this is seen to be a false process, for where there is no discrimination, there is no desire or suffering. BACK

60 Words are learnt, concepts are formed, and through confusion with them one assumes that even ultimate Truth can be expressed by words; but Nibbana is beyond such 'playwords'. BACK

61 The allusion is to the Sangha's degeneracy in Mila's days and to the pride in scholarship which strangled Dhamma practice. BACK

62 Mind-essence is the true nature of mind (see **note 14**). BACK

63 Gain, loss, praise, blame, honour, ridicule, joy, sorrow. BACK

64 They are 3 different aspects or descriptions of Enlightenment. BACK

65 They are 3 different aspects or descriptions of Enlightenment. BACK

66 They are 3 different aspects or descriptions of Enlightenment. BACK

67 Realizing their nature to be void (suñña). BACK

68 A heat produced in the body by means of meditation, thus enabling a yogi to live high in the snow mountains. Milarepa wore only one piece of cotton cloth. BACK

69 Non-distinction between Means (the first five Parami) and Wisdom (the sixth one). BACK